South Haven Tribune

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April 26, 2026

# South Haven welcomes chief lifeguard

## Figueredo speaks to city council on new program

**By JULIE NEWELL**
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven's new beach safety manager and chief lifeguard David Figueredo officially introduced himself to the community during the regular city council meeting this week.

Figueredo will lead the new lifeguard program that is scheduled to begin on Memorial Day. The city's previous lifeguard program had been active from the late 1930s until it was terminated in 2001.

In 2025, the South Haven City Council made the creation of a lifeguard program a top priority.

"This was a process that has been in the works since council made the nod last November to start a lifeguard program," City Manager Kate Hosier said during Monday's meeting. "There has been a multi-faceted group with HR, DPW, beach safety, SHAES, the South Haven Police Department and of course myself involved in pulling together all the different parts of a very complex program."

Figueredo has seven years of open water lifeguarding experience along Lake Michigan and has worked as a beach lifeguard, lifeguard manager and lakefront supervisor.

"That experience shaped my understanding of what a high-performing beach safety program can be and I'm excited to bring that foundation to South Haven," Figueredo said.

Police Chief Adam DeBoer said during the meeting that since Figueredo started working on April 6, they have been able to be better on track with getting the program on its feet.

They have ordered various supplies including rescue boards, whistles and first aid kits, as well as having medical bags donated by South Haven Area Emergency Services.

DeBoer said they have a tentative training timeline which is scheduled to have the last day be the Friday before Memorial Day.

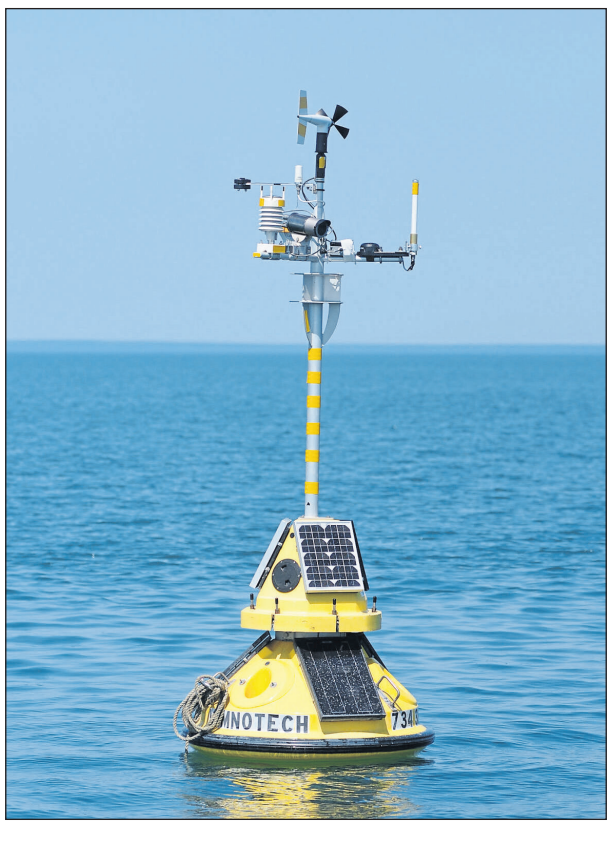
"That opens up the possibility of possibly having guards on the beach Saturday, before Memorial Day," DeBoer said. "But, we should have guards on the beach on Memorial Day to start the beach season."

During the April 7, 2025 city council meeting, U.S. Lifesaving Association National Certification Committee Chair Chris Brewster gave an aquatic safety assessment and recommendation report to city leadership.

In May of 2025, the city hired Double Haul Solutions as consultants to design and implement a lifeguard program.

"I look forward to building this program to the highest possible standards and contributing to a safe and successful season," Figueredo said.

*Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104*



# WEATHER BUOY OFF SOUTH HAVEN DEPLOYED

**ABOVE:** The Lake Michigan Weather Buoy off South Haven was placed 2.5 miles offshore on Wednesday.

**RIGHT:** The Lake Michigan Weather Buoy is a project of the South Haven Steelheaders that has been placed in the lake annually since 2014.

Photo provided / Tom Renner

# SH beach parking rates to increase

## Rates, violation fees raised to help fund lifeguard program

**By JULIE NEWELL**
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven City Council is increasing the parking rates and fees in the beach parking areas.

The increase metered parking rates and weekly permit rates as well as parking violation fees – which were approved Monday night – were discussed at the March 16 Committee of the Whole meeting.

The parking rates will change to $3 an hour, from $10 per day and $50 for weekly pass from $30.

This change is expected to increase revenue by $800,000.

"This really isn't a parking increase," Council Member Tom Capps said during Monday's meeting. "However, if I want to go have lunch at the beach, it's going to cost me three bucks, not $10, and if I want to spend three hours there it's going to cost me $9 not $10. Now, if I wanted to stay for eight hours I'm going to pay more money and you should."

The revenue will be used to cover the additional expenses for the lifeguard program, capital improvement projects, as well as operation and maintenance costs for the beaches.

"I don't consider it an increase that the city's trying to get rich off (of), we're trying to pay for the lifeguard program," Capps said. "I think it's reasonable."

The seasonal three-year beach parking permit is not proposed to change as this is the last year to purchase the sticker for $80. The parking permit will be brought up for review and discussion in the fall.

The city council also introduced an ordinance to amend the parking violation fines in the code of ordinances.

The parking violation fines will now be increased to $45. If not paid within seven days, the fine is increased to $75 and then to $100 if not paid within 60 days.

"We really want to motivate people to one, park in the right areas; and then two, make sure you're paying your fines on time," Hosier said.

Along with the parking fees and violation fines, city council approved updated parking restrictions throughout the city.

"We had adopted a parking restrictions resolution cleaning up some items on, I want to say Eagle and Huron (streets), last year," Hosier said. "We have updated this resolution to include the beach areas just to make sure that all the parking restrictions such as metered, paid parking, no parking, loading zones, three-hour restrictions are all under one resolution."

See **PARKING**, page A2

# LMC secures $525K in grants to support mental health

**By TRIBUNE STAFF**

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Lake Michigan College has been awarded three grants totaling $525,000 to expand student support services and combat food insecurity across its Benton Harbor, South Haven and Bertrand Innovation Center campuses.

The awards come from two grant programs administered by the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential and one from the Ohio-Michigan Basic Needs Initiative.

The funding package includes a $400,000 Barrier Removal – Growing Institutional Capacity grant, a $75,000 Hunger-Free Campus Activities grant, and a $50,000 OH-MI Pathways Together Initiative grant. Together, the awards will allow LMC to launch new mental health resources, establish a centralized Community Resource Center, install smart food pickup lockers, expand its campus food pantry and snack shack network, create a meal-kit program, and build a more comprehensive infrastructure for identifying and responding to student basic needs.

"When students are struggling to meet basic needs, finishing a degree becomes much harder," LMC President Ken Flowers said in a news release. "These grants allow us to build the kind of proactive, connected support systems that help students stay enrolled and succeed."

The awards reflect LMC's sustained commitment to student success beyond the classroom. Utilization of the College's Red Hawk Refuel Pantry and Red Hawk Snack Shacks has grown 34 percent year over year, underscoring the urgency of investing in systems that keep students stable, enrolled, and on track to complete their degrees.

"For many students, the biggest threat to graduation isn't academics – it's life circumstances," said Dr. Beverly Walker-Griffea, MiLEAP director. "This funding helps colleges like Lake Michigan College put stronger systems in place so students can stay focused on their education and complete their degrees."

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## OBITUARIES

### David Fenske, MD

Dr. David Fenske, the man whose life was a tapestry woven with love, learning and service, passed quietly on April 9, 2026, at Bronson South Haven Hospital, surrounded by his loving family.

David Herbert was born in Grosse Pointe Farms, Mich., in 1932, the son of Harry and Esther Fenske. He graduated from Albion College in 1954, the University of Michigan School of Medicine in 1957 and the School of Aviation Medicine as a medical officer.

David was a major in the United States Air Force. He served for 12 years as an ophthalmologist and flight surgeon, logging over 1,500 hours in aircraft and helicopters. As an Air Force officer stationed at the University of Iowa in the early 1960s, David spent three years conducting radiation research. He conducted some of the early research on radiation exposure and eye protection in efforts to prevent cataract development. This work was in connection with the effects of an atomic bomb explosion.

While flying with a SAC outfit in Arizona as a flight surgeon, his position on the B-27 was under the co-pilot's seat and in front of the atomic bomb they carried. David trained as a flight surgeon at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona, managed the Flight Surgeon Department and served as chief of aviation medicine and medical examiner.

David served as flight surgeon for Air Force One during the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson, accompanying the President on flights out of Washington, D.C. He was chief of the department of ophthalmology at Andrews Air Force Base in Washington, D.C. and an advisor to the U.S. Surgeon General. He was also chief of ophthalmology and otolaryngology at Andrews Air Force Base and a consultant for Far East Asia relations.

In 1968, he was deployed to Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. He accompanied his injured patients to Japan and Taiwan when necessary. David traveled throughout Vietnam, providing advanced training to medical stations in the care of eye injuries, and lectured to Vietnamese physicians. When not caring for U.S. soldiers, he went out into the surrounding areas voluntarily and treated Vietnamese citizens, whom he had come to know and care deeply about. During this time, David was exposed to Agent Orange, as it was widely used and its effects were not yet disclosed. He worked with the International Eye Bank while in Vietnam, performing corneal transplants on Vietnamese patients, and was Chairman of the Orphanage Project in Cam Ranh City.

David was awarded the Republic of Vietnam's highest civilian honor, the Meritorious Service Award.

After proudly serving in the U.S. Air Force for 12 years, David returned to South Haven, Mich., where he opened his medical practice and became chief of staff and chief of surgery at South Haven Hospital.

David was a private and gentle soul who found satisfaction and purpose in practicing medicine in his beloved South Haven, where he cared for local families for several generations.

David embraced every day as a new chapter in his extraordinary life. In his free time, he could often be found sailing the Great Lakes in his restored wooden boats or biking across the United States, Germany, and New Zealand with friends and family.

He also enjoyed playing tennis, reading, cooking, kayaking, gardening, welding, sculpting, playing the piano, bassoon, and trumpet and building wooden boats. He once turned a humble telephone pole into a sailing mast, reflecting his resourcefulness, patience and quiet mastery of his craft. He was also always ready to serve one of his famous Manhattans.

A humble man who never sought recognition for his efforts, David's many achievements – from childhood throughout his life – were remarkable. Digging the grave for Henry Ford while in high school and singing on stage at Carnegie Hall are two such examples of his extraordinary life.

While at Albion College, he was a member of the Delta Tau Delta Fraternity, and upon returning to South Haven, he quickly became a community leader. Commodore of the South Haven Yacht Club, lifetime member of the Michigan Maritime Museum, board member of the South Haven Chamber of Commerce, Chief of Staff at South Haven Hospital, volunteer groundskeeper at the Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum and State of Michigan Master Gardener are just a few of his many contributions.

David leaves behind his devoted wife, Sandy (Schoenhofen), of 40 years; his children: Jill (who preceded him in death), Kim, Eileen, Carrie, Emily, Jennifer, and Alycia; his grandchildren: Jonathan, Mark, Rachael, Tre, Courtney, Audrey, Alice, Isabella and Henry; his great-grandchildren: Ashley, Lexie and Georgia; and his beloved brother-in-law, Dave Miller.

David also leaves behind a legacy of love and inspiration to all who traveled through life with him during his 94-year journey. His love and profound influence will continue to guide his family and all who had the privilege of knowing him, and these memories will live on forever in their hearts.

Those wishing to share a memory of David online may do so at www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269-637-0333.

### Eleanore Forsythe-Roberts

Oct. 22, 1931 – March 21, 2026

Eleanore Ann Forsythe-Roberts was born on Oct. 22, 1931 to Alexander and Dorothy (Schroeder) Bohle in Michigan City, Ind. She passed away peacefully with her children by her side, at the age of 94 in South Haven, Mich. on March 21, 2026.

Ellie spent her younger years in Coloma and Watervliet, Mich. and graduated from Watervliet High School in 1949. She attended Illinois Masonic Hospital in Chicago, where she earned her nursing degree in 1952.

Marrying Homer Preston Forsythe in 1955, they moved to Portage, Mich. to build a life together and raise their family. She made a career as an ICU nursing instructor at Bronson Hospital in Kalamazoo, Mich. and obtained a master's degree from Western Michigan University. In later years she worked in women's retail.

Ellie had many places she called home, the beloved family cabin on the Little Manistee River in Peacock, Lyons Street in beautiful South Haven and Concordia Retirement Community in Bella Vista, Ark. It was there that she met and married Keith Roberts in 2017. Ellie returned to South Haven for her final years, residing at River Ridge Retirement Village.

Ellie was known and loved for her optimistic, adventurous spirit, bringing fun and joy to even the simplest moments. She showed true compassion for others through her nursing career, as a caregiver to children and in the deep connection she had with family and friends.

Ellie had a flair for fashion and decorating, and found joy in caring for plants, loving family pets, collecting charming knickknacks, bird watching, playing cards and traveling. She brightened any gathering with her zany sense of humor and talkative nature. Ellie will be remembered for living life on her own terms through her independent, witty and unforgettable personality.

Ellie is survived by her children: Steven (Lisa) Forsythe, Laurie (Paul) Kohls, Julie (Scott) Neumann and Paul Forsythe. Grandchildren: Alex Forsythe, Erin (Jordan) Lemasters, Courtney (Austin) Hunt, Tyler Forsythe, Sappho (Andy) Q, and Cameron Kohls. Great grandchildren: Mac Lemasters and Preston Hunt.

Eleanore is preceded in death by her mother Dorothy, father Alexander, husbands, Prest Forsythe and Keith Roberts, brother William Bohle and sisters Dorothy Vollrath and Polly Zordel.

Visitation for Ellie will take place from 11:30 a.m. until the time of the memorial service at 12:30 p.m. on Saturday, May 2 at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church 06321 Blue Star Memorial Hwy, South Haven, Michigan 49090.

Pastor Travis Wilson will officiate. Ellie will be laid to rest at North Shore Memory Gardens at a later date.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Ellie's memory may be made to Wings of Hope Hospice Care or Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church.

To those who choose to leave a memory or condolence go to www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements are entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269-637-0333.

# Spencer Fire Trucks marks 40 years in business

**By TRIBUNE STAFF**

SOUTH HAVEN — Spencer Fire Trucks, a family-owned fire apparatus manufacturer based in South Haven, Mich. is marking its 40th year in business.

According to a news release the business is celebrating four decades of steady growth, local investment and service to fire departments across the country.

Founded in 1986 by Brian Spencer as a small repair operation behind his home, the company has grown into a nationally recognized manufacturer of purpose-built fire apparatus while remaining rooted in Southwest Michigan.

Today, Spencer Fire Trucks designs and builds custom fire trucks for departments nationwide from its South Haven facility.

"South Haven has always been home for our family and it's where we will continue to build our future," Spencer Fire Trucks President Grant Spencer said in the release. "Our goal has never been rapid growth for its own sake; it's been about building quality apparatus for fire departments while supporting the local economy and creating long-term opportunities for the people who live and work here."

Over four decades, Spencer Fire Trucks has expanded its operations while maintaining family ownership and a hands-on approach. Today, the company is led by the founder's sons, who grew up in and around the business and now carry it forward.

"Under their leadership, Spencer has doubled its workforce and tripled production, strengthening its position as a leader in custom fire apparatus manufacturing and an economic anchor in Southwest Michigan," the release stated.

Nearly half of Spencer's customers are located outside Michigan, bringing national manufacturing demand into the region and supporting year-round skilled employment locally.

The company has continued to invest in its facilities and workforce to meet the evolving needs of fire departments without relocating or consolidating operations elsewhere.

"The Spencer family believed in South Haven when it would have been easier to move elsewhere," South Haven Mayor Annie Brown said in the release. "We are grateful to the Spencer family for giving back to our community, creating jobs and being a vital part of South Haven's economic engine for 40 years."

As the company continues to expand, Spencer Fire Trucks is creating new employment opportunities across manufacturing, engineering and support roles, offering stable, skilled-trade careers within a family-owned organization.

"Our success has always been tied to the people who work here and the community that supports us," Spencer said in the release. "This milestone is as much about them as it is about the trucks we build."

Interested candidates can apply on the website at spencerfiretrucks.com/careers.

Additional information about Spencer Fire Trucks' 40th anniversary and its history is available at spencerfiretrucks.com/40yearsone focus.

## PARKING

From page A1

### Other items

City council approved two special events including:

- Worship and Baptism Night, to be held from 4 to 8 p.m. on Aug. 23 on South Beach.
- Light Up The Lake 2026 Fireworks, to be held starting at 10:30 p.m. on July 3 on the North Pier.

City council introduced an amendment to a zoning ordinance's language that prevents the redevelopment of a nonconforming lot with a nonconforming structure.

City council introduced an ordinance to rezone the property at 241 Oak St. from the R-1B single-family residential district to the RM-1 multiple-family residential district.

The 2.67-acre property is the site of the Victoria Resort, which has been open since the 1920s.

Resorts are not permitted uses in the R-1B zoning district, but they are permitted by special land use in the RM-1 district. The Victoria Resort is currently operating as a nonconforming use.

Allison Koetsier, one of the owners of the property, said the purpose of the rezoning is to bring the current resort's use into compliance and to create an indoor gathering space, which is not possible under the current zoning regulations.

City council also introduced an ordinance to amend the zoning ordinance to allow for projecting or hanging signs to be placed on buildings that also have an awning in the Central Business District.

*Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104*


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Meet our Pet of the Week, Cufflink!
Cufflink is a 1-year-old tuxedo cat with a big personality and an even bigger love for being the center of attention. If something fun is happening, he fully expects to be involved. Preferably as the star. If you're looking for a fun, outgoing companion who will make you laugh daily, Cufflink is ready for the role.
Submit an adoption survey at al-van.org/adopt
South Haven Pet Mayor Fundraiser
Al-Van Humane Society is excited to announce our Honorary Pet Mayor of South Haven fundraiser, kicking off May 5th. Pets of all kinds can "run for office," and the community can vote with donations to support local animals in need. Nominations will open May 5th through May 11th, with voting to follow.
For more details on how to enter your pet in the race, visit the event page on our website at al-van.org/petmayor.
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The Michigan Flywheelers Museum will bring history to life during the annual Farm History Day.

Photos provided

The Michigan Flywheelers Museum's annual Farm History Day provides a hands on experience of the early 20th-century rural life.

# Michigan Flywheelers Museum to host farm history day

**By TRIBUNE STAFF**

SOUTH HAVEN — History will come to life this spring as the Michigan Flywheelers Museum hosts its annual Farm History Day.

According to a news release, the event will take place from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on May 8.

"Farm History Day started as a way we could promote education and interest in early farm life," Museum President Patrick Ingalls said in the release. "We also didn't want to charge admission so that schools could bring students without worrying about funds for the trip."

Designed to give students a "boots-on-the-ground" look at early 20th-century rural life, student can participate in 40 activities including candle dipping, tin punching, corn grinding and other chores of the past.

Guests can also explore Olde Town – the museum's 1920s replica village with places like Pearl's Millinery Shop and Over The Hill Forge as well as watch logs being cut into lumber at the sawmill and watch shingles being made at the shingle mill.

This hands-on event is open to the public and offered free of charge to all schools and homeschooled groups.

"The Michigan Flywheelers Museum is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of antique gas engines, tractors and early farm machinery," the release stated.

The Michigan Flywheelers Museum is located at 06285 68th Street, South Haven.

For more information or to register a large school group, go to www.michiganflywheelers.org or email michiganflywheelers@yahoo.com.

# Sustainable agriculture at forefront of LMC roundtable

**By LAUREN RICE**
Paxton Media Group

BENTON HARBOR — Several dozen audience members were present to hear from local farmers during a recent roundtable at Lake Michigan College on the future of farming and sustainable agriculture.

Panelists included local wine and cider producers, farm markets, livestock and produce, who spoke on a variety of topics – from the true meaning of local agriculture to sustainability, community engagement and consumer best practices.

Roundtable moderator Tim Godfrey, who is director of wine and viticulture technologies at LMC, said a key takeaway of the event, for him, was hope.

Don Campbell / HP staff

From left, Paula Camp, owner of Carriage House Ciders, Maxx Eichberg, owner of Stranger Wine Co., Katie Burdett, owner of Farmette, Brett Muchow, owner of Verdant Hollow, and Paul Meulemans owner of Wild Coyote Organic Farm, take part in a roundtable discussion, "From Farm to Future: Sustainable Agriculture in Berrien County," on April 9 at Lake Michigan College.

"There's a really bright future of people that are interested in being part of this," he said.

During and after the world wars in the 20th century, chemical development expounded. Combined with the increased need for food in the 1950s baby boom, the pitches for large-scale crop farming and the use of pesticides were easy ones to make, said Maxx Eichberg, owner of Stranger Wine Co.

"It made farming easier, but it also took out the human aspect of farming and the intuitive nature that all of us farm with: where are we going, what do we need, and how can we be proactive with these measures we take on our farms?" he said. "... We really as Americans got lazy."

Regenerative farming practices will vary from farm to farm. Brett Muchow of Verdant Hollow, a livestock farm, said the key component is how farming practices can add back to the system that yields produce. For example, plants draw nutrients from the soil, and grazing livestock there in the off-seasons fertilizes it to build it back up.

In general, pesticides and heavy chemical use were also spoken about negatively.

For farms to be sustainable, not just from the standpoint of how the farms are managed, the community also has to be engaged and brought into the conversation.

"Part of regenerative agriculture's mission is to push that disconnect that we have between modern consumers and farmers, the people producing," Muchow said. "I think we are also uniquely situated to cater to a wide variety of people who can see the connection farms have with their food and their animals and how that changes a community. It's important to have people experience that on a visceral level."

Muchow said he has an Airbnb on the farm property and takes bookings for people to go for hikes with goats.

"If you can add value-added experiences, people yearn for it," he said. "They want to have those experiences. ... There's nothing wrong with spreading that knowledge and those experiences to people."

Paula Camp, owner of Carriage House Ciders, said she does events as well, inviting people to visit for a day or a weekend to participate in the cider-making process to, essentially, make their own cider.

"We also try to make sure our cidery is accessible and welcoming to everybody, no matter who they are, no matter what they look like or what they believe," she said. "... A lot of our industry, natural food, organic food, real food, regenerative food is dominated by white folks. We have a lot of people who are of color in our community. We also have jobs for people of color who may or may not have any formal training. We welcome them as part of our team and part of our audience. That's going to have to be a big push for all of us."

## Consumer best practices

While the word "agriculture" may summon mental images of commercial corn and soybean crops seen from the car window on a road trip, panelists were encouraging the audience, as consumers, to engage on a personal level with the people and farms that make their food.

Katie Burdett, who runs the market and cafe Farmette, said consumers have a lot to think about when it comes to selecting foods and where to buy them.

"There's plenty of brainwashing when it comes to the word 'natural' or 'sustainable,'" she said. "Those sorts of things aren't regulated. So you as a consumer have a lot on your plate to be able to ask 'who do I trust? What do I do? How do I do the right thing?' That's how where you shop matters. ... If you find a place like a food co-op or a grocery store you love, or even a personal relationship with your farmer that can help you support your agricultural community."

Muchow said where you choose to buy the food you eat is a political act.

"It's difficult to know your farmer in every different aspect (of what you eat)," he said. "When you go to the supermarket, you're choosing to support that industry."

Camp said Michigan is the second-most biodiverse state in the country. Changing the land by transitioning away from agricultural uses changes quality of life.

"Is this how we want to live? Do we want to be an urban area, a suburb of South Bend or Chicago, or do we want to retain that natural association we've had with agriculture for the last couple hundred years? ... These are political questions that are going to have to be answered in the next couple decades," Camp said.

Eichberg advocated for small, incremental changes.

"We can make smaller, incremental changes that build up, but that's institutionalized change, and that takes generations to do," he said. "So we need to stop talking about it and actually do it. If we talk about it at the table, it needs to leave that table. We need to have these awkward conversations. We can't just say 'how's the weather today?' It's like, 'have you thought about our food systems lately?' And then see where that brings us."

Access to fresh foods is a complicating factor stemming from systemic, political challenges. Eichberg said there's a lot of food insecurity in specific population sects in the county that have not been well cared for in the last century.

Muchow said just because there is land in Berrien County, doesn't mean diverse communities have historically been supported by that.

"Just because there is wonderful beautiful land in Berrien County, doesn't mean people have had access to it," he said. "... There's more you have to to do get out of the industrialization framework of farming."

The final question presented to panelists was what makes them optimistic about their industry.

"Everybody here represents authentic products," Camp said. "I think there is an absolute yearning in society for authenticity of all kinds. This group, and lots of others like them, are providing that in a remarkable environment here in Southwest Michigan that cannot be reproduced anywhere else in the country. I am also optimistic because you all are here."

*Contact: lrice@TheHP.com, 932-0360*

# Redwood to perform jazz fusion concert at Scott Club in South Haven on May 17

**By TRIBUNE STAFF**

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Scott Club and Foundry Hall are closing out the 2025–2026 concert series will a special performance by Redwood.

According to a news release, Redwood will perform at 3 p.m. on May 17 at the Scott Club.

"Redwood seamlessly blends contemporary jazz with a wide range of Black musical traditions, all filtered through her own sophisticated and deeply personal artistry," the release stated.

A musician, composer, producer, educator, DJ and recording artist from Washington, D.C., Redwood – born Sequoia Snyder – is a recent graduate of Michigan State University's jazz studies program.

She has been mentored by jazz luminaries including Rodney Whitaker, Dee Dee Bridgewater and Jason Moran.

"Fostered by early influences in gospel, R&B, hip-hop funk, soul and pop, Redwood's passion and talent led her to the prestigious Duke Ellington School of the Arts," the release stated.

Her work has earned national recognition, including the Kennedy Center's Betty Carter Jazz Ahead Residency and participation in Dee Dee Bridgewater's Woodshed Network.

Redwood has performed with a range of artists, including Kenny Barron, Cory Henry, Teri Lyne Carrington, Patrice Rushen, Jazzmeia Horn, Afrobeats star CKay and the R&B band The Internet. She has also appeared with the New York City Ballet and at the Roots Picnic music festival.

This concert is presented in collaboration with Foundry Hall and supported in part by Holtec-Palisades, Low Family Foundation and Rotary Club of South Haven in memory of Carole Hodgman.

The concert will be also broadcast on Foundry Hall's Twitch channel.

The concert and free and open to the public, but reservations are required by May 15.

To reserve a seat contact info@scottclub.org.

# South Haven seeks election inspectors

**By TRIBUNE STAFF**

SOUTH HAVEN — The City of South Haven is now accepting applications for Election Inspectors to serve in upcoming elections.

According to a news release, this is a paid position and no prior experience is needed.

"Election Inspectors are essential to the voting process, helping ensure that every election runs smoothly and accurately," the release stated. " This is a paid opportunity to serve your community, assist voters at the polls and be part of a meaningful civic experience."

All election inspectors are required to complete certification training. Training sessions will be held in July and the city clerk's office will coordinate scheduling for applicants.

Interested individuals are encouraged to apply by May 14. Applicants must be registered voters in the State of Michigan.

Applications are available at City Hall and on the city's website.

"Join us in supporting accessible, fair and successful elections in our community," the release stated.

# Michigan House education budget bans sales of soda and candy at schools

Katy Kildee / The Detroit News / TNS

**U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon, left, speaks during a press conference about President Donald Trump's Education Freedom Tax Credit alongside state Rep. Tim Kelly (R-Saginaw Township) on March 27 at Hamtramck Academy.**

**By BETH LEBLANC and CRAIG MAUGER**
The Detroit News (TNS)

LANSING — The Republican-led Michigan House's proposed education budget prohibits schools receiving state funding for breakfast and lunch programs from selling soda pop or candy on school grounds.

The $21.5 billion spending bill also bars certain ingredients in food served through the program, including bromated vegetable oil, potassium bromate, titanium dioxide and several food dyes.

State Rep. Tim Kelly, a Saginaw Township Republican who leads the House's K-12 budget process, said there is already a ban on the sale of pop and candy through the state-subsidized school breakfast and lunch programs. The language in the bill unveiled Tuesday would expand that ban to require schools to ensure pop or candy is not made "available for purchase to students" at other points of sale, such as vending machines in school buildings.

"I guess we're really trying to keep it out of their hands altogether in a school setting," Kelly said.

Kelly said the proposed ban on the sale of sugar-laden pop and candy inside Michigan schools is inspired by the Trump administration's Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) movement, which is being led by U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

"We know that these things lead to all sorts of chronic conditions, so why start them early?" Kelly said.

Sen. Darrin Camilleri, D-Trenton, said he was willing to discuss getting healthier foods in schools. But Camilleri said that he wasn't sure whether the House GOP plan was the right approach.

Jennifer Smith, director of government relations for the Michigan Association of School Boards, said she was uncertain how many schools sell candy or soda pop and which would be affected by the legislation. The bill does not appear to ban baked goods, she noted, which are also a source of sugar.

Smith noted that many school districts contract for food services, so meeting the ingredient requirement might be difficult.

"We're not making our food most of the time," Smith said. "Most districts don't have their own kitchen. It becomes hard for districts to regulate that."

The GOP-authored House bill was pushed Tuesday from a subcommittee to the full House Appropriations Committee, where it awaits a vote planned for Wednesday morning.

Both the House and Senate education bills, after they pass their respective chambers, will be subject to negotiations as the chambers work out a final budget for the 2027 fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1.

Michigan House Republicans, in their proposed Department of Health and Human Services budget, also included language that would exclude soda and candy from the list of eligible products individuals could buy with food stamps.

Several states have already been granted waivers under Kennedy's MAHA effort to prohibit the purchase of candy and soda with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funds, formerly known as food stamps. Some SNAP recipients last month sued over the waivers that prevent them from having access to sugary drinks and candy.

The language related to the soda and candy ban at schools is contained in a section of the budget that provides state-subsidized breakfasts and lunches to all students.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer set aside about $200 million for the continuation of the universal meals program in her proposed budget introduced earlier this year.

House Republicans, in their budget, set aside $201.6 million but set conditions on the funding, including making the program available to nonpublic schools and prohibiting candy and pop.

Candy, as defined in the bill, does not include "bars, drops, or pieces that contain flour or that require refrigeration." It instead includes "preparations of sugar, honey or other sweeteners in combination with chocolate, fruits, nuts or other ingredients in the form of bars, drops or pieces."

Soda is defined in the bill as "any nonalcoholic beverage that contains natural or artificial sweeteners." It does not include drinks that contain milk, milk substitutes or more than 50 percent vegetable or fruit juice by volume.

# Supreme Court rules for Michigan in its fight to shut down an aging energy pipeline

**By MARK SHERMAN**
Associated Press

Rahmat Gul / AP

**The U.S. Supreme Court is seen in Washington on April 7.**

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Wednesday sided with Michigan in ruling that the state's lawsuit seeking to shut down a section of an aging pipeline beneath a Great Lakes channel will stay in state court.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote for a unanimous court that the Enbridge energy company waited too long to try to move the case to federal court.

The case is part of a messy legal dispute about a pipeline that has moved crude oil and natural gas liquids between Superior, Wisconsin, and Sarnia, Ontario, since 1953.

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel sued in state court in June 2019 seeking to void the easement that allows Enbridge to operate a 4.5-mile section of pipeline under the Straits of Mackinac, which link Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. Nessel, a Democrat, won a restraining order shutting down the pipeline from Ingham County Judge James Jamo in June 2020, although Enbridge was allowed to continue operations after meeting safety requirements.

Enbridge moved the lawsuit into federal court in 2021, arguing it affects U.S. and Canadian trade. But a three-judge panel from the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals sent the case back to Jamo in June 2024, finding that the company missed a 30-day deadline to change jurisdictions.

The pipeline at issue is called Line 5. Concerns over the section beneath the straits rupturing and causing a catastrophic spill have been growing since 2017, when Enbridge engineers revealed they had known about gaps in the section's protective coating since 2014. A boat anchor damaged the section in 2018, intensifying fears of a spill.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources under Gov. Gretchen Whitmer revoked the straits easement for Line 5 in 2020. Enbridge filed a separate federal lawsuit challenging the revocation.

Enbridge won a ruling from a federal judge blocking the move, but Whitmer, a Democrat, has appealed to the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. In March, the Supreme Court rejected Whitmer's appeal claiming that she couldn't be sued in federal court.

It was unclear how the federal ruling blocking Whitmer's revocation attempt would affect Nessel's case in state court. The company said in a statement that the judge in the Whitmer case has already decided federal regulators, not the state, are responsible for Line 5 safety and they have found no issues that would warrant shutting it down.

But Nessel said the case is far from over. "This unanimous ruling from the United States Supreme Court makes emphatically clear that our lawsuit against Enbridge belongs before the state court, where we've argued since 2019 that Line 5 does not have a legal right to the Straits bottomlands," she said in a statement.

Enbridge also is seeking permits to encase the section of pipeline beneath the straits in a protective tunnel. The Michigan Public Service Commission granted the relevant permits in 2023, but a coalition of environmental groups and Michigan tribes has filed a lawsuit seeking to void state permits for the tunnel. The state Supreme Court is weighing that case.

Enbridge also needs approval from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy.

The pipeline is at the center of a separate legal dispute in Wisconsin as well. A federal judge in Madison last summer gave Enbridge three years to shut down part of Line 5 that runs across the Bad River Band of Lake Superior's reservation. The company has appealed the shutdown order to the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, but it started work in February to reroute the line around the reservation.

The Bad River and environmental groups have filed a state lawsuit seeking to halt the work, arguing regulators have underestimated the damage the reroute construction will cause. That case also is pending.


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Disposal of NORMAL HOUSEHOLD REFUSE ONLY. ONE (1) TRIP ONLY; One (1) appliance per household.

NO REFRIGERATORS.
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**RECYCLING-** FREE Save the Environment.
**LOCATION:** CR 384 - 1 mile east of M-43 OR 1 mile west of 68th Street - North Side.

TRANSFER STATION PASS REQUIRED.

Geneva Township Board
FREE FREE FREE FREE FREE

**0900 LEGALS**

GENEVA TOWNSHIP 2026-2027 Regular Board Meeting
Second Tuesday each month at 7:00 p.m. at 62127 CR 380

| | |
|---|---|
| April 14, 2026 | October 13, 2026 |
| May 12, 2026 | Nov 10 2026 |
| June 9, 2026 | Dec 8, 2026 |
| July 14, 2026 | January 12, 2027 |
| Aug 11, 2026 | February 9, 2027 |
| Sept 8, 2026 | March 9, 2027 |

March 26, 2027 4:00 P.M.
Annual Meeting

PEOPLE DO READ SMALL ADS!

**0900 LEGALS**

Meeting Synopsis
Casco Township Board
Meeting Monday, April 20th, 7:00 PM
**CALL TO ORDER:** Overhiser called the meeting to order at 7p.
**PRESENT:** Overhiser, Clevenger, Ridley, Fleming, & Campbell
**ABSENT:** None
**ITEMS APPROVED:** Minutes from 3/26/26
Outdoor Gathering/Noise Variance for Sanchez
Zoning Moratorium
Pay schedule change for employees
Signage for Township Hall
Hall Change order for additional electrical outlets
2026 Salary Resolutions for the Board
Land Division Act Amendment
**ADJOURNMENT:** 8:42 PM
Allan Overhiser,
Casco Supervisor
Rachel Ridley, Casco Clerk

Sell Your

In The Classifieds!

# Van Buren County democrats celebrate program milestone

By TRIBUNE STAFF

HARTFORD — The Van Buren County Democratic Party recently hit a one-year milestone in their Demonstrating Community program.

According to a news release, the party has donated to community food and resource pantries through monthly drives from Mattawan to South Haven, including: Eleanor's Pantry in Paw Paw, Mattawan Area Pantry, Decatur Human Services, South Haven's We Care Community Resource Center and Gobles Methodist/Kendall Area Ministries Food Pantry.

"It began in March 2025 with a cry for toilet paper from Paw Paw's Eleanor's Pantry," the release stated. "The Van Buren Democrats' members and allies donated hundreds of rolls of toilet paper. The program has continued every month since."

Photos provided

The Van Buren County Democratic Party have donated to community food and resource pantries through monthly drives.

Each organization chooses one item and the party members work to deliver as much of that item as they can gather. From cases of soups in Mattawan, to dish soap in Gobles, to 4,000 loads of laundry detergent needed at the South Haven based We Care organization

As part of the program, the party members participated in the South Haven We Care Community Resource Center's annual "Island Sit."

The monthly drive brought in over $500 in donations and with a matching dollar for dollar offer, they raised over $1,000.

"The Van Buren County Democratic Party's DEMonstrating commUNITY program has been a huge success and they will continue their monthly drives next month by collecting donations of pasta for the Mattawan Area Pantry," the release stated.

For more information, go to vanburendems.org.

# Van Buren County emphasizes importance of work zone safety

By TRIBUNE STAFF

LAWRENCE — Transportation agencies across the country recently recognized National Work Zone Awareness Week.

According to a news release, National Work Zone Awareness Week took place from April 20 to 24 and encouraged drivers to slow down, stay alert and help keep everyone safe.

"As spring arrives, orange barrels, cones and construction signs are once again appearing on Michigan roadways signaling the start of another busy road construction season," the release stated. "For the Van Buren County Road Commission, work zone safety remains a top priority."

Road construction zones present changing traffic patterns, reduced speeds and workers operating close to live traffic. A moment of inattention or impatience can have life-altering consequences.

"It only takes a split second of distraction to change lives forever," Van Buren County Road Commission Managing Director Bret Witkowski said in the release. "When approaching a work zone, motorists should slow down, follow posted signage, remain alert and be patient. Safe driving decisions protect not only our workers, but fellow drivers and their families."

The road commission's work zone safety tips including:

■ Expect the unexpected – Speed limits are often reduced, lanes may shift, and workers or equipment may enter traffic areas without warning.

■ Eliminate distractions – Avoid cell phone use and other distractions. Lives are at stake.

■ Obey signs and flaggers – Construction crews and traffic control devices are there for everyone's safety – follow their directions.

■ Slow down and keep your distance – Speeding fines are doubled in Michigan work zones. Maintain a safe following distance.

■ Stay alert – Watch for sudden stops, lane changes, and brake lights from other vehicles.

■ Be patient and calm – Work zones are temporary and necessary to improve the safety and condition of our roads.

"Our crews are committed to making our roads safer and more reliable," Witkowski said in the release. "We can repair and improve our infrastructure safely if everyone does their part. Working together, zero work zone deaths is an achievable goal."

Motorists are urged to watch for road commission crews as well as contractors working throughout the county this construction season.

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U.S. Ambassador

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# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## Ongoing events

**Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting:** Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

**Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting:** Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

**Three Blondes Brewing:** Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

**Sparkle and Spice Boutique:** Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9-10 a.m.

**South Haven Center for the Arts:** Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

**South Haven Center for the Arts:** Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

**Candlelight Yoga:** Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

**Food pantry:** First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

**Food pantry:** Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Thursdays.

**Food, clothing, baby pantry:** Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

**Personal care and clothing pantry:** First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

**Baby pantry:** Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

**Baby pantry:** Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

**South Haven Memorial Library:** Story Time on 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays through May 26, 2026.

**HawksHead:** Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

**Michigan Maritime Museum:** Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

**Lakeside Social Bowling Alley:** Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

**Bridge:** Chicago Scoring at 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

**Bridge:** Duplicate Scoring at 1 p.m. on Wednesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

**Michigan Maritime Museum:** free admission on the first Sunday of every month from November through April.

**First United Methodist Church:** Free meals every Tuesday night. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Meal is served at 6 p.m.

**South Haven Memorial Library:** Bridge Card Game from 1 to 4 p.m. every Tuesday and Wednesday. Open to the public. Beginners are welcome.

**Covert Branch Library:** After school art workshop for students grades 6 through 12 every Monday from 3 to 5 p.m.

## April

**26 – First Congregational UCC:** Spring concert series featuring Diane and Lisa tribute to Gershwin at 3 p.m.

**27 – Golf:** Boys varsity team compete in the SAC Jam at 4 p.m. at Hawkshead.

**27 – Track:** Boys and girls teams compete in the SAC Tri with Allegan and Coloma schools at 4:30 p.m.

**27 – Soccer:** Girls middle school team against Bloomingdale High School at 5 p.m.

**27 – Soccer:** Girls middle school team against Coloma High School at 6:15 p.m.

**28 – Rotary Club:** Morning meeting. Presentation will be by Nicholas Dalton on Rural Development Enterprise as Economic/Business Development.

**28 – Track:** Boys and girls middle school teams compete in the SAC Quad at 4:30 p.m.

**28 – Baseball:** Boys varsity team against Watervliet High School at 4:30 p.m.

**28 – Softball:** Girls varsity team against Watervliet High School at 4:30 p.m.

**29 – Soccer:** Girls junior varsity team against Hartford Public School at 5 p.m.

**29 – Soccer:** Girls middle school team against Bridgman Public School at 5 p.m.

**29 –Soccer:** Girls middle school team against Plainwell Schools at 6:15 p.m.

**29 – Soccer:** Girls varsity team against Bridgman Public Schools at 6:30 p.m.

**29 – South Haven Garden Club:** Talk on tiny particles, big problems by Tami Renkoski from 7 to 9 p.m. at Lake Michigan College South Haven campus.

**30 – South Haven Speaker Series:** Ambassador Bridget Brink speaking on "Why Ukraine and Eastern Europe Matter." Refreshments available at 6:30 p.m. Program begins at 7 p.m. at Lake Michigan College, South Haven campus.

**30 – Softball:** Girls junior varsity team against Harper Creek High School at 4 p.m.

**30 – Baseball:** Boys junior varsity team against Hopkins High School at 4:30 p.m.

**30 – Tennis:** Girls varsity team against Galesburg-Augusta High School at 4:30 p.m.

## May

**1 – Our Town Players:** "The Mad Tea Party" performance at 7 p.m. at Listiak Auditorium.

**1 – South Haven Memorial Library:** Play-Doh play date for preschoolers at 11 a.m.

**2 – Our Town Players:** "The Mad Tea Party" performance at 4 p.m. at Listiak Auditorium.

**2 –South Haven Memorial Library:** Mother's Day flower pot decoration. Free kids activity from 10:30 a.m. to noon.

**7 – National Day of Prayer:** At noon on the front lawn of South Haven City Hall

**5 – Scott Club:** "Revolution, Reaction and Reform in History" presentation at 1 p.m. in person at Scott Club and on Zoom.

**8 – Michigan Flywheelers Museum:** Farm History Day from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**9 – South Haven Performance Series:** Gilmore Piano Festival artists Elliot Wuu at 7 p.m. at Peace Lutheran Church. Tickets cost $15.

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# FOCUS

Mina Alali poses with Merlin, a miniature pot-bellied pig, at home in Sacramento on April 2.

# This pig got his parents together and won a world record – all in 4 years

Merlin, a miniature potbellied pig, stands at home in Sacramento, California, on April 2.

Mina Alali feeds Merlin, a miniature potbellied pig, a carrot at home in Sacramento on April 2. The Instagram-famous pig recently earned a Guinness World Record for having the most Instagram followers of any pig.

Merlin, a miniature potbellied pig, poses at home in Sacramento on April 2. Merlin recently earned a Guinness World Record for having the most Instagram followers of any pig and uses buttons to communicate with his owner, Mina Alali, to request food or express his feelings.

**By CAMILA PEDROSA**
The Sacramento Bee (TNS)

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — "You don't see a pig on a leash every day with a hat on," Mina Alali said as her potbelly pig wearing a colorful propeller hat tugged at her skirt, hoping to receive a handful of oats.

The propeller hat has become a signature look for the pig – a 4-year-old Vietnamese potbelly named Merlin – who has more than 1 million followers on Instagram, a surprisingly hefty vocabulary and a Guinness World Record.

For four years, Alali has been posting photos and videos of Merlin on Instagram. The pet pig quickly went viral with videos of him learning how to speak using buttons that, when pressed, play a recording of a word or phrase. He now has over 30 buttons he presses to ask for treats, to go outside and to share his thoughts.

Alali said adopting the pig was one of the best decisions she has ever made. Merlin has not only provided companionship and allowed his mom the opportunity to be self-employed through social media – but he also brought his family together.

"He's pretty much the best thing that's ever happened to me," Alali said. "Next to my fiancé."

A wild path to wildlife

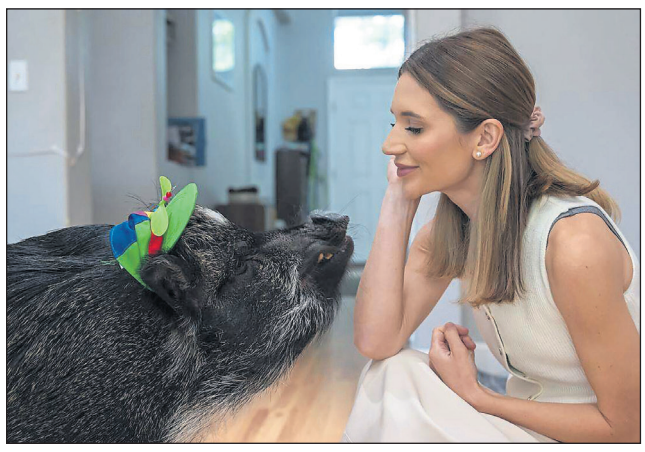
Alali grew up in Davis in a half-Iranian household, notably without any non-standard pets.

"We had two dogs and a fish," she said. However, it was a longtime dream of hers to adopt a pig.

Growing up, Alali's career aspirations had nothing to do with animals; she hoped to become a singer-songwriter. She spent time in her native Iran studying classical Persian music and taking voice lessons before attending Berklee College of Music in Boston for music business management.

Alali came back to the West Coast and signed with a small Sacramento-based music label. But after producing four albums, she made the decision to walk away.

"I quickly realized that I did not want to be an artist full-time," she said. "I just thought that the industry itself was not morally aligned with myself. So it was quite a crisis."



Photos by Paul Kitagaki Jr. / The Sacramento Bee / TNS

Mina Alali poses with Merlin, a miniature potbellied pig, at home in Sacramento, California, on April 2. The Instagram-famous pig recently earned a Guinness World Record for having the most Instagram followers of any pig.

Soon after in late 2019, Alali adopted her first pet as an adult: a bearded dragon named Mochi.

"I spent a lot of time with him, I became obsessed with him very quickly," she said. "We spent all our time together, and I decided to try and train him."

As the COVID-19 pandemic loomed and TikTok became a form of escape and connection, Alali started posting her experience training Mochi to come to her, high five and shake hands.

One of the first videos she posted of the reptile "blew up overnight," she said, earning around 5 million views. She continued posting videos of Mochi for fun, and accrued nearly 1 million followers on her TikTok account with the playful reptile videos.

In 2022, while working a day job in influencer management, an opportunity for Alali to fulfill her lifelong dream of having a pig came true.

"It was an impromptu decision," Alali said. "I remember coming across a TikTok video of someone with a pig, and I just turned to my coworker, and I was like, 'Oh, I want a pig so bad,' and she was like, 'What's stopping you?'"

Alali came across baby Merlin in her search for a pet pig and instantly knew he was the one for her.

"He was older and bigger than some of the other pigs that were being adopted quite fast," she said. "So I was like, I'll be there in two days to pick him up."

Mochi has since died, but the legacy he began with Alali lives on through Merlin and his other animal siblings.

A record-breaking pig

Four months after adopting Merlin, Alali started a dedicated Instagram page for him after he became popular in videos with Mochi.

As Merlin learned how to use the pre-recorded buttons, audiences fell in love with the then-tiny pig's big attitude. Some of his first buttons included, "I want a kiss, b----," and "I'm hungry, b----," the latter of which Alali turned into merchandise.

The small family's newest addition helped push Alali's TikTok account over the 1 million follower threshold. Nearly four years later, she has more than 2.5 million TikTok followers and works on her social media accounts full-time while volunteering at the Wildlife Care Association of Sacramento, an animal rehabilitation organization.

As of February, the now-180-pound Merlin is "Officially Amazing," according to Guinness World Records.

With more than 1.1 million Instagram followers, Merlin is officially the most followed pig on social media, certified by Guinness's records team.

According to Alali, when she looked into securing the record, it already existed, having been set by a different Insta-famous swine with slightly fewer followers than Merlin.

"When I saw that, I was like, I hate to take your spot, but I really want this plaque," she said. "It's just cool to have a Guinness World Record."

Sacramento's smallest zoo

Alali now lives in Natomas with her fiancé, Alex Saraceno, along with Merlin; a girl group of rats named Monica, Moira and Amy; a former prison pigeon named Al Capone; a bearded dragon named Muffy; and a dog named Maverick.

"(The animals) used to be all M-names, and then when Alex came in, I was like you know what? He deserves some A-names too," Alali said.

The couple met and fell in love in 2023 all thanks to Merlin, according to Alali.

"He saw a Reel of Merlin and I on Instagram and DM'ed me," Alali said. "His message was, 'I want to marry you.' I said back, 'Wow, what an introduction.'"

Alali and Saraceno began messaging long distance, as he lived on the East Coast. They started formally dating shortly after. Within a year, the couple was engaged. Saraceno moved to Sacramento and they are now planning their wedding for September.

"Merlin's gonna be the ring boarer," Alali said.

In addition to the posse of pets at home, Alali and Saraceno also adopted two cows who were rescued from an unethically managed petting zoo. The steers reside on a pasture in Davis, and one day the family hopes to have enough space to keep them at home.

Alali still works on writing and recording music on her own. A song she wrote for Saraceno shortly after they started dating will play as she walks down the aisle on their wedding day, and another song features Merlin's beloved grunts and oinks.

Through her volunteering at the wildlife rehab center and her social media work, Alali said she found a passion for supporting rescue animals. Her ultimate goal is to one day get licensed to become an at-home rehabilitator and eventually open an animal sanctuary on a large plot of land.

"All these animals deserve love and affection, and they just want to be cared for, just like us humans," she said. "I think I've been able to open up people's minds and hearts to we should maybe treat pigs more kindly, or cows, extending that to reptiles or wildlife."

*Visit The Sacramento Bee at sacbee.com.*

# FOCUS

Nada Hassanein / Stateline / TNS

**Midwife Sheila Simms Watson treats Isis Daaga during a pregnancy checkup at the Southern Birth Justice Network's mobile midwifery clinic in Miami on March 21.**

# *'It's a safe space'*

## Mobile midwifery clinics meet patients where they are

**By NADA HASSANEIN**
Stateline.org (TNS)

MIAMI — Midwife Sheila Simms Watson leaned to gently press on the pregnant woman's belly. Me'Asia Taylor lay on a bed fitted with tie-dyed purple printed sheets in the corner of the RV.

Far from a typical camper, this RV houses a mobile midwifery clinic for prenatal, postpartum and women's general health care.

"Roll when you're getting up, and we can help you. You can sit there for a moment, all right, so you're not lightheaded, not dizzy," said Watson, whom patients and doulas call "Mama Sheila."

Calm and slow, led by Watson's soothing and attentive demeanor, the appointments are unrushed.

Run by the Southern Birth Justice Network, the mobile midwifery clinic brings care to majority-Black and Latino neighborhoods across Miami-Dade County several times a month. The clinic aims to offer a more relaxed setting, where women are comfortable and heard, their cultures are integrated, and they can connect with doulas from diverse backgrounds.

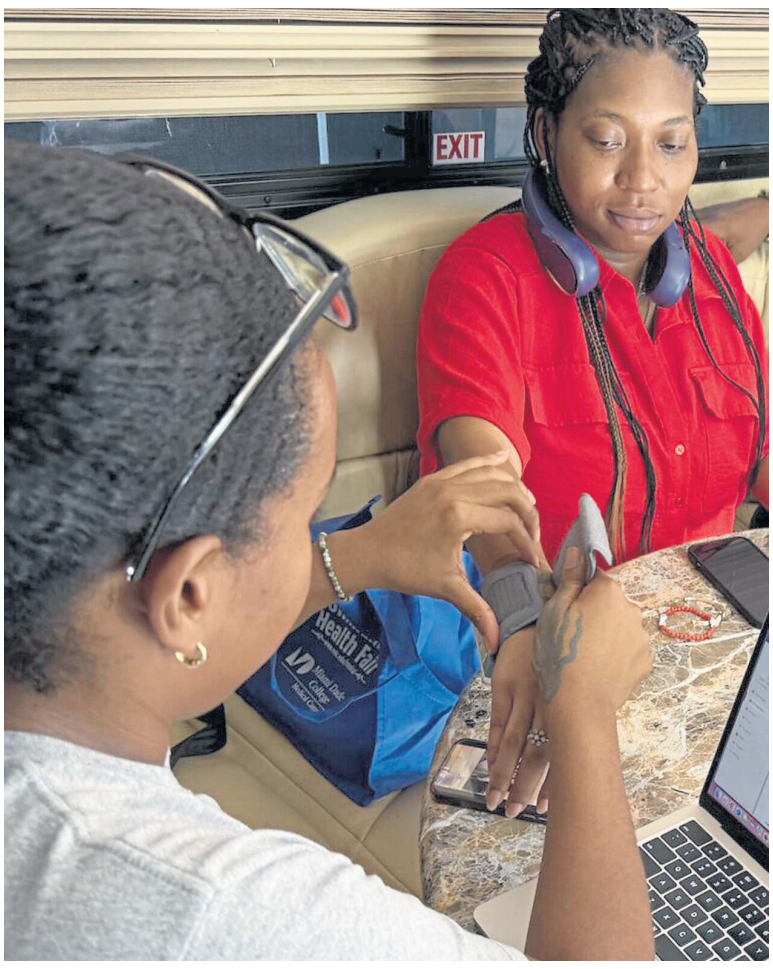
On the half-moon bench inside the RV, Watson, a doula and a midwife in training sit with patients. They take blood pressures and draw blood. They ask the women about their lives: How is their mental health and sleep? Do they have support at home? Do they want to give birth at a hospital or birth center with a midwife?

Taylor said pre-eclampsia, a dangerous pregnancy condition, runs in her family. She wanted to make sure she had space and time to express her concerns about her first pregnancy.

Taylor said she wants a midwife for her delivery. Many women of color have reported feeling marginalized or dismissed in medical settings. "I've just seen too many people have bad experiences," Taylor told Watson.

The U.S. has markedly higher maternal mortality and infant mortality rates compared with other high-income countries, and women and babies of color fare the worst. Black women's maternal death rates are three times higher than those of white women, and American Indian and Alaska Native women's rates are twice that of white women. Researchers point to implicit bias, less regular access to prenatal care and higher rates of poverty.

OB-GYN shortages and labor and delivery units closing continue to make getting care harder. Last year, more than two dozen hospital labor and delivery units across the nation closed, including some in South Florida. And pregnant patients living miles away, or feeling uneasy about going to the doctor, may even forgo care.




**Me'Asia Taylor, pregnant with her first child, is pictured inside the mobile midwifery clinic run by the Southern Birth Justice Network on March 7.**

Midwives can help fill gaps, maternal health equity advocates say, and mobile clinics can meet patients where they are.

"It really helps to disrupt this idea that patients must navigate these complex systems to receive care – and instead, (mobile midwifery) reimagines care as something that should be responsive to the needs of patients and should be community-centered," said Tufts University professor and maternal health scholar Ndidiamaka Amutah-Onukagha.

But mobile units are not as common for midwifery as they are for other areas of care, such as dentistry or family medicine, the American College of Nurse-Midwives told Stateline. Other prenatal mobile outreach efforts in the state include an OB-GYN-run mobile unit by the University of Florida that serves areas around north-central Alachua County and an operation called The Midwife Bus in Central Florida.

To increase access to care, maternal health advocates are also pushing states to change regulations that restrict midwifery. The American College of Nurse-Midwives recently filed a lawsuit against Mississippi for requiring nurse-midwives to have agreements with physicians in order to practice. Last week, Jamarah Amani, a midwife and the executive director of the Southern Birth Justice Network, joined other plaintiffs in filing a lawsuit against Georgia over its restrictions. But supporters of the rules say they are meant to protect patients and foster communication between clinicians.

Offering culturally centered prenatal care that women are more inclined to use can help address inequities in maternal health, Amani said. The group trains doulas, offers telehealth, provides referrals such as to mental health therapists, and advocates for equitable policies across the South.

Most of the mobile clinic's clients – about 70 percent – are on Medicaid or uninsured, and the clinic is funded through federal and university grants, as well as donations.

"(Midwifery) presents like a luxury concierge-type of service," Amani said. "Our goal is to really change that and to bring it back to the community in a very grassroots way."

### Preserving tradition

The Southern Birth Justice Network keeps a small drum on a table at a nearby booth. It represents the heartbeat, and ancestral reverence, Amani said. Drums are a universal language, and the instrument is meant to symbolize culture.

For doulas and many midwives like Amani and Watson, bringing their profession to communities today is the continuation of a significant part of Black American heritage.

Throughout history, Black midwives were venerated in their communities. Many practices were rooted in West African traditions. These midwives were the keepers of Black ancestral records, and delivered many white women's babies. Enslaved women who were midwives traveled for deliveries. Some routes, long and traversed by foot, were dangerous in the deep rural South. During the Jim Crow era, Black Americans were denied care at hospitals or given inferior care.

"They only had protection if someone would send a carriage for them if they were going to deliver a white woman's baby. But to care for the Black families, they often had to go in the middle of the night, alone," Amani said. "We talk about the legacy of Black midwives as health care providers, but also as social pillars, as community leaders, as resistors of oppression."

In the 20th century, medical institutions began to oppose midwifery, sometimes using racist and sexist campaigns to target the practice. They argued it was unhygienic and lobbied across states to dismantle midwifery. At the same time, while developing the field of obstetrics, doctors conducted gynecological experiments on Black women. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has acknowledged this history and said it's committed to fighting racism and inequities.

Dr. Jamila Perritt, an OB-GYN and president and CEO of Physicians for Reproductive Health, said that in order to address structural barriers and close gaps, policies have to prioritize access to care, such as allowing midwives to expand their practices. Throughout the South especially, states still restrict midwives from practicing independently, despite widespread maternal health care deserts. She also pointed to research showing midwifery is associated with fewer C-sections, less preterm labor and better patient satisfaction.

"Expanding access to midwifery care, and expanding collaborations between physicians and midwives, only improves outcomes," Perritt said.

### Cultivating trust

On a recent breezy and brisk Saturday morning, the Southern Birth Justice Network's midwives and doulas were stationed in the parking lot of the Freedom Lab, a local community center that hosts food and clothing distribution and a free urgent care center.

At the booth by the mobile clinic, under the shade of a royal-purple awning, meditation music, low-key and mellow, reverberated from a small speaker. There was a cooler filled with oranges, water and other snacks for the clinic's pregnant patients.

"I'm going to keep giving you food. You need to eat enough," one doula told a patient, handing her an orange and a liter of spring water.

Staff had surveys to help assess a new patient's needs, and Florida-specific pamphlets on pregnant patients' rights. The group is working on other state-specific guides for Louisiana, Massachusetts, Tennessee and Texas.

The table also held a portrait of the late midwife Ada "Becky" Sprouse, who started the mobile midwife clinic around 2008. She'd drive it to the city of Homestead, an agricultural hub in Miami-Dade County. There, she offered free midwifery care to migrant farmworkers, many of whom couldn't afford care throughout their pregnancies.

Sprouse passed the clinic on to Amani, who relaunched the mobile unit and broadened the scope of the Southern Birth Justice Network.

Patients told Stateline trust was one of the main reasons they sought out the clinic. One patient said she spent 2 ½ hours on public transit that day so that she could see the team.

For now, deliveries take place at hospitals or neighboring birth centers, where some of the group's midwives also work. But the organization recently bought a building to open its own freestanding birth center, aiming for next year, along with a larger RV.

One patient, Isis Daaga, turned to Amani to deliver her other children after her first birth at a hospital. Despite the pressure she felt and her need to push during labor, Daaga recalled, hospital staff prevented her from delivering.

"They literally held my knees together," Daaga said. "They were like, 'the doctor's not here yet,' and the nurses were scared to deliver the baby." In many hospitals, protocol is to wait for the doctor in case an emergency occurs.

By the time the doctor came, Daaga had a severe perineal tear, and she delivered the baby in one push. She had been in labor for 15 hours.

"I was in pain, I was upset," said Daaga, a mental health therapist who is 35 weeks pregnant.

At the mobile clinic and with the midwives, Daaga said she feels supported.

"They make me feel the way I try to make my clients feel, like, it's a safe space. You're not judged here. I have a lot going on," she said. "If I'm MIA or something, most of them will call and text me and (say), 'Girl, you need to come in.'"

*Stateline is part of States Newsroom, a national nonprofit news organization focused on state policy.*

BakiBG / Getty Images

Dreamstime / TNS

Estradiol, a form of estrogen that is used to treat menopause symptoms.

Alex Brandon / AP

Dr. Marty Makary, commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, speaks in the Oval Office of the White House during an Oct. 16 event. When Makary took office, he made hormone replacement therapy a priority, speaking out about how he believed outdated research had been keeping women from life-changing treatments.

# Hormone drugs make $6.3 billion comeback after FDA nixes safety warnings

**By ANNA EDNEY**
Bloomberg News (TNS)

Lea Didion didn't realize the night sweats she began experiencing in her 40s might be a sign of perimenopause.

Her doctor clued her in and suggested she consider hormone replacement therapy, a once-vilified treatment that has come roaring back to help relieve hot flashes, vaginal dryness and other symptoms women start to experience in mid-life.

Didion soon began seeing a flood of social media posts and news articles about the benefits of hormone therapy, especially as the Food and Drug Administration prepared to ask drugmakers to remove strict black box warnings that had been placed on the medicine since 2003 – product labels that the agency now says led to "fear and misinformation." In the fall, she started on a weekly estradiol patch and a nightly progesterone pill.

"It's been shockingly helpful," the California resident, 45, said. The aches she assumed were just part of getting older disappeared, her energy level increased and her gut health improved. "Some crappy research has been hurting women for decades."

Last year nearly 32 million prescriptions were written for estradiol, a form of estrogen that is used to treat menopause symptoms, compared with 18 million in 2021, according to Symphony Health data compiled by Bloomberg Intelligence. The rush for the hormones, mainly sold as patches placed on the skin, accelerated when FDA Commissioner Marty Makary took office last year and made it a priority, speaking out about how he believed outdated research had been keeping women from life-changing treatments. He's asked drugmakers to tone down references to risks of cardiovascular disease, breast cancer and probable dementia on hormone therapy labels – a move to encourage women to discuss the treatments with their doctors and weigh their options more fairly.

Set against that cultural shift, the about-face from the nation's leading drug regulator helped estradiol prescriptions surge 32 percent between 2024 and 2025 alone, creating a $6.3 billion windfall for generic drugmakers including Viatris Inc., Sandoz Group AG and Amneal Pharmaceuticals Inc. Estradiol patches are so hot right now that women are having trouble finding them at pharmacies.

Perimenopause – the transitional stage that precedes the end of a woman's period and is defined by estrogen fluctuations – and menopause have become hot topics in the last few years. Celebrities including Gwyneth Paltrow, Halle Berry and Naomi Watts have shared their experiences to reduce stigma, and bestselling books like "The New Menopause" have guided women in managing symptoms and advocating for treatments.

Makary's interest sprang from his mother's experience – he says she was never offered hormone therapy – and his fascination with "the concept of medical reversals, medical dogma, new evidence," he said in an interview with Bloomberg News. He wrote about hormone therapy in his book "Blind Spots" and talked about his views on podcasts and in public almost immediately after becoming commissioner.

"When you realize that 50 million-plus women may have been denied or talked out of hormone therapy," he said, "you realize, given the profound long-term health benefits, that there has been a giant missed public health opportunity."

The original research that raised alarm bells about hormone therapy was published in 2002 and conducted by the Women's Health Initiative, which found an increased risk of developing breast cancer. But the average age of women in the study was 63 years – more than a decade past the average age of a woman starting menopause – and participants were given a hormone formulation no longer in common use, according to the FDA. The Menopause Society now says that the risks are low enough in younger women who are closer in age to their menopause transition that the benefits of hormone therapy can outweigh them.

Hormone therapy is "fairly safe," said Lubna Pal, a professor of obstetrics, gynecology and reproductive sciences at the Yale School of Medicine who specializes in menopause. The black box warnings were "unjustly put there in the first place."

In recent years, patches have become the preferred way to use estradiol. The Menopause Society says absorption through the skin might be safer than passing through the liver, as a tablet requires, though more research is needed.

While the number of prescriptions for patches has risen sharply in line with the increase in estradiol prescriptions overall, prescriptions for tablets have remained fairly steady over the last decade. Patches – typically placed on the lower abdomen – were officially listed as in shortage on Jan. 30 by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, which tracks the drug supply.

Estradiol also comes in a vaginal cream that can relieve dryness and discomfort associated with sexual activity. Makary told Bloomberg the agency is working to make vaginal estrogen available over-the-counter so it can be bought without a prescription, given its "profound benefits" like preventing urinary tract infections and reducing painful sex. It's a process that can typically take about six months, though Makary said he'd like to see the change sooner.

Estradiol can help with a variety of symptoms, said Rachel Pope, chief of the female sexual health division at University Hospitals in Ohio, including sleep interruptions and thinning hair. Many of her patients also reported relief from aching joints.

Recently, 48 hours before her last estradiol patch needed to be replaced, Jessica Halem learned that her CVS in Massachusetts was out of stock. Her doctor switched her to a weekly version that the pharmacy still had available, instead of the twice-weekly one she had been using.

"It sucked," Halem, 53, said. "I could immediately feel the difference."

She planned to try an estradiol spray instead, but CVS told her that was also delayed. "I truly cannot believe this keeps happening," she said.

Many women on estradiol also take a progesterone pill at night that protects their uteruses from any abnormal growth estrogen might cause. Prescriptions for progesterone pills increased to almost 14 million last year, up from 5.2 million in 2021, according to Symphony Health data compiled by Bloomberg Intelligence. The renewed excitement over the therapies is setting off some alarm bells in the medical community, with doctors worried that supplies could become even more constricted.

"As that awareness continues to grow, the demand is only going up," said Kathleen Jordan, chief medical officer of Midi, a telehealth startup focused on women in midlife that opened up shop in 2021, the same year estradiol prescriptions started steadily rising ahead of last year's explosion. "I hope our pharmaceutical industry realizes this."

The first menopausal hormone therapy was approved by the FDA in 1942. Almost 30 percent of postmenopausal women in the U.S. were on hormone therapy in 2001, the year before the now-refuted Women's Health Initiative study came out.

The resulting black box warnings – the most stringent safety alert assigned by the FDA – led usage to plummet to as low as 4.7 percent in 2020 among postmenopausal women in the U.S., according to a JAMA Health Forum paper.

More women are accessing hormone therapy now, but Bloomberg data indicates it's still only about 7 percent of those in the relevant age range. This means there's a lot of room to grow. And given how old the drugs are, most are generic now, making them less expensive.

Midi has tried to press drug manufacturers on those points, hoping to secure commitments to increase production, Jordan said. Viatris, Sandoz and Amneal told Bloomberg they were working to expand production, but didn't respond to questions seeking additional details. Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd. didn't respond to questions about its estradiol. Viatris, Sandoz and Amneal are the top three patch sellers, while Teva sells mostly estradiol tablets.

With the safety warnings coming off of many hormone therapy products, Makary said there's more work to be done. He's planning to convene a panel of experts to discuss the increased use of the treatments and the best candidates to take them.

The push from the FDA and increased supplies of the drugs could lead to even greater usage in the coming years – a welcome shift, doctors say, after years of skepticism from patients.

"Five years ago I was trying to convince women that they don't have to suffer and they should try hormone therapy," Pope said. Women now "want hormone therapy with no hesitation at all. It has changed a lot."

# FOCUS

## LZ Granderson: If you keep listening, Prince's lyrics will keep teaching

By LZ GRANDERSON
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

It's been a decade since Prince died – though his words are with me every day.

The tattoo on my right biceps reads "rich in personality," borrowed from the opening verse of 1984's "Baby, I'm a Star."

*Hey, look me over*
*Tell me, do you like what you see?*
*Hey, I ain't got no money*
*But, honey, I'm rich on personality*

Growing up poor during the 1980s was like being in an upside down version of "The Wonder Years": I wondered if the lights would be on when I came home from school; I wondered if we would have enough to eat that night; I wondered if poor was all there was.

As such, the songs about poverty I heard on the radio – John Mellencamp's "Pink Houses," "The Message" from the Furious Five, Donna Summer's "She Works Hard for the Money" – were more than hits. They were snapshots of different, yet familiar worlds. So naturally, a song with the line "I ain't got no money" feels like home. And those same five words were the opening line of Prince's first hit, in 1979, "I Wanna Be Your Lover."

I was too young to understand sex, thus the full meaning of that song wasn't clear to me until later – but I knew what it meant not to have any money. In fact, one winter it seemed everyone in school wore these black boots with a large white kangaroo logo on the side. Don't ask me why, we just did. Anyway, the poorer kids – trying to keep up – often bought knockoffs, which usually came with a noticeably smaller logo. The really broke kids, the ones like me, well, we had an entirely different animal on our boots. I think I had a polar bear or a scorpion wearing a scarf or something. Whatever it was, it wasn't right.

Even some of the teachers laughed.

We never really leave behind our early years. Even decades later, I tend to hear lyrics about poverty like an echo from nearby.

In the opening five words that began his ascent, Prince told his crush he didn't have any money before quickly pointing out the ones who do "always seem to let you down." The sense that there's more than the material hark back to him being raised a Seventh Day Adventist and spending his high school years as a de facto orphan. When you don't have much, you have to shape your sense of self-worth around something greater than yourself, to look outside of your situation. It's in doing so that words like "nothing comes from dreamers but dreams" and "nothing comes from talkers but sound" act like breadcrumbs leading to a higher place. The spiritual nature of Prince's songwriting provides constant reminders that there's more to living than the trappings of a glamorous life. You can wear furs, read the Robb Report, watch "Dynasty" but:

*Money only pays the rent.*
*Love is forever, that's all your life.*
*Love is heaven sent,*
*It's glamorous.*

That's why Prince's observations reverberate after his passing more than the sexual innuendos he was initially known for. It was his storytelling, not the salaciousness, that made the sound of "Purple Rain" during the montage of the "Stranger Things" finale move audiences. Not just the generation that grew up hearing it every hour on the radio. Also those who didn't know who Prince was until Eleven told Mike goodbye.

**When you don't have much, you have to shape your sense of self-worth around something greater than yourself, to look outside of your situation. It's in doing so that words like "nothing comes from dreamers but dreams" and "nothing comes from talkers but sound" act like breadcrumbs leading to a higher place.**

Although admittedly on occasion, I think about the robin that "sings a masterpiece that lives and dies unheard" from " The Screams of Passion " or his sonically lush collaboration with George Clinton, "We Can Funk":

*I could tell you things to get you excited, things you never heard.*
*You know the Kama Sutra?*
*I could rewrite it with half as many words.*

In lesser hands, the line would sound like overcompensating projectile from the bowels of the manosphere.

But Prince's words about sex feel less like macho boasts from an insecure man and more like the surrendering of an attentive lover ... if only for the night. This is the craftsman who is also vulnerable enough to write "would you run to me if somebody hurts you, even if that somebody was me?" and to proclaim "love is too weak to define just what you mean to me."

Amna Nawaz, co-anchor and co-managing editor of "PBS NewsHour," told me nowadays she often finds herself quoting "dearly beloved, we are gathered here today, to get through this thing called life."

For Donnie Wahlberg, whose band New Kids on the Block shared the charts with Prince in the late '80s and early '90s, one lyric stayed with him even though he missed a key part of it for years.

"I never knew what he said after the words 'and if the elevator tries to bring you down, go crazy' … like 'one, two, three, four,'" Wahlberg told me recently. "One day my friend heard me sing along to the intro and incredulously asked, 'What the heck did you just say?'"

Prince's version is: "If the elevator tries to bring you down, go crazy, punch a higher floor."

To mark the 10th anniversary of Prince's death, which will be Tuesday, celebrations are planned across the country, including in Minneapolis, where his life and career began. His former art director and personal photographer, Steve Parke, who recently published a photo book called " Prince: Black, White, Color," told me he misses the friendship more than the opportunities life working with a rock star provided. When Parke feels down, he thinks of the words from "Pop Life":

*What's the matter with your life*
*Is the poverty bringing you down?*
*Is the mailman jerking you 'round?*
*Did he put your million-dollar check in someone else's box?*

"He wasn't about dwelling on the bad, he wasn't about waiting for things to get better, like hoping to get a check in the mailbox," Parke said. Instead, Prince sought to "spread good for goodness' sake regardless of the circumstance. That's really who he was at his core."

At a time when greed was considered good, Prince was among the lyricists reminding us that being good still mattered more.

*LZ Granderson is an opinion columnist for the Los Angeles Times. Visit Los Angeles Times at latimes.com.*

A Mural honoring Prince in his hometown of Minneapolis is seen on Aug. 20, 2023.
RJMS / Getty Images

Stephen Maturen / Getty Images / TNS

A man wearing a Prince shirt at the Prince Memorial Street Party on April 22, 2017, in Minneapolis, one year after the musician's death.

# ‘Right to race’ laws and the battle over America’s local racetracks

**By JOSHUA VADEBONCOEUR**
Assistant Professor of Sport Management, Gardner-Webb University
(The Conversation)

Across the United States, the local auto racing tracks that have anchored rural and working-class communities for generations are disappearing.

Some have lost out to real estate developers when suburban sprawl makes the land beneath them too valuable to ignore. Others are strangled, slowly, by noise complaints and nuisance lawsuits filed by residents who moved to the area long after the track had been built.

Now, state legislatures are pushing back. From Georgia to Wisconsin, lawmakers have been introducing so-called “right to race” bills.

Over the past year, at least 13 state legislatures have put forward bills shielding racetracks from nuisance lawsuits filed by property owners who moved into the area after the track was built. These follow the passage of similar legislation in Iowa and North Carolina in 2025.

As a historian and analyst of American stock car racing, I’ve been watching this legislation closely.

The argument being made inside these statehouses is a legal one. But what’s really being contested is something older and harder to legislate: whose idea of a place is preserved, and whose vision is pushed to its margins.

## What these laws do

For nearby residents, the impacts of a racetrack can be difficult to ignore. Events are often loud and sometimes unpredictable. They can run for hours. And the surrounding roads can be clogged with traffic before and after events.

That said, there is a long-standing legal principle known as “coming to the nuisance.” This holds that someone who moves next to existing businesses or infrastructure – whether they’re factories, racetracks, train tracks or airports – cannot then sue over disturbances from their regular operation.

In practice, however, that principle has frequently failed to protect tracks.

Old Dominion Speedway in northern Virginia, opened in the 1950s, was ultimately relocated south to Thornburg, where a new facility opened in 2016, after noise complaints from a nearby townhouse development proved impossible to satisfy.

In Asheville, North Carolina, an environmental nonprofit channeled the opposition of newer residents into a campaign against the New Asheville Speedway. The city ultimately purchased the track’s land in 1998 and converted it into a public park.

Onondaga Dragway in Ingham County, Michigan, which had reopened in 2013 after an earlier closure, spent the next 12 years locked in legal proceedings with neighboring residents before a judge finally ordered it shuttered in 2025. Onondaga’s closure directly prompted Michigan’s right to race legislation.

At their core, right to race bills establish that if a racetrack was lawfully built and operating before a neighboring property owner purchased or developed their land, that owner cannot bring nuisance claims against the facility.

Iowa’s law, signed in May 2025, passed unanimously in both chambers – 45-0 in the Senate and 92-0 in the House. North Carolina’s followed in September 2025, and Kansas enacted similar legislation in April 2026.

The Specialty Equipment Market Association has lobbied for the bills, arguing that they address the same problem that spurred a spate of “right to farm” legislation in the 1970s and ’80s. These laws shielded farmers from nuisance complaints due to odors, noise, dust and slow-moving farm vehicles on local roads.

Right to race legislation hasn’t been politically controversial, in part because it is often framed as a matter of common sense.

As Michigan state Sen. Roger Hauck put it, “I don’t think it’s fair to a business that’s been zoned to be there legally by the township to have someone start complaining about the noise of the racetrack when it’s been there since before the person has been there.”

Still, the bills are not identical, and the differences matter.

Michigan’s bills and Kentucky’s bill extend immunity regardless of any future changes to a facility, meaning a track that dramatically expands its operations would still be shielded.

A more limited approach was proposed in Georgia – though the bill ultimately failed to advance before the April 2026 deadline – which would have preserved the right to sue if an existing track expanded its footprint.

More expansive versions of these bills have drawn concern in some cases. In Wisconsin, for example, Gov. Tony Evers vetoed a similar bill after it passed the Legislature, arguing it would create “unfair and unnecessary hurdles for people pursuing legal avenues to vindicate the use and enjoyment of their land.”

## Land value, not noise, is the real threat

While noise complaints and nuisance suits are the immediate trigger of many track closures, they are often symptoms of a deeper economic pressure: land value.

The land that racetracks sit on – large, often flat, typically in areas that were once rural but no longer are – has become extraordinarily attractive to developers.

And while housing has been the traditional threat, new ones have emerged.

Warehouses and logistics facilities have taken up land on the outskirts of American cities over the past decade. More recently, the explosion of aritificial intelligence infrastructure investment has compelled developers of data centers to seek out vast tracts of land.

Greenville-Pickens Speedway in South Carolina, the site of NASCAR’s first live televised race in 1971, has been dormant since 2022 as its future became entangled in a potential sale. It’s facing conversion into an industrial park, led by a prospective buyer rather than pressure from nuisance lawsuits. Local supporters have rallied to preserve the site, and county officials have taken steps toward recognizing it as a historic property, but those efforts don’t prevent a private sale or redevelopment. South Carolina’s HB 4706 targets nuisance lawsuits, not private sales or redevelopment, meaning it offers no protection in cases like this.

Nashville’s Fairgrounds Speedway, which has hosted racing since 1904 on city-owned property, isn’t being threatened by a private nuisance suit. Instead, its future is in doubt due to a charter amendment campaign – a ballot-driven effort that would eliminate the site’s designation for auto racing, potentially opening the door to redevelopment.

## What communities stand to lose

In my view, most of the bills – even if they don’t say it explicitly – are about whether communities that have grown up around local racetracks have any legitimate claim on the continued existence of those tracks.

As one supporter in the ongoing Greenville-Pickens debate put it, the track is “more than just a racetrack to us. It’s a place where we can actually go and actually talk to others that have the same interests and passion about racing.”

Another supporter plainly said that Greenville-Pickens “is far more than a racetrack. It is the center of our world.”

Research shows that when shared social spaces disappear, the community life built around them does not simply find a new home. And in my ongoing research on grassroots racing, I’ve explored how local tracks function as some of the last spaces in American working-class life where people gather not as passive consumers but as active participants – as drivers, crew members, track workers and fans.

Owosso Speedway Operations Lead Dennis Wheeler, speaking in support of Michigan’s right to race legislation, described his track as not just a racetrack but a “small business … an employer, a tourism driver and a gathering place for families across mid-Michigan.”

These bills address the nuisance lawsuit problem, which is real. But rarely do they address land value, which is often the bigger driver of track closures. Nor do they create any funding mechanism to help tracks modernize or survive economically. And finally, they do not require that developers notify homebuyers of nearby racing facilities.

For now, it’s clear that pressure from real estate developers is threatening something that took generations to build. The bills moving through statehouses this year represent an attempt to fight back.

Some of them are well crafted and appropriately limited. Others are blunt instruments that could create their own problems. But all of them are arriving late, after many tracks have already closed and after many communities have already lost something they cannot get back.

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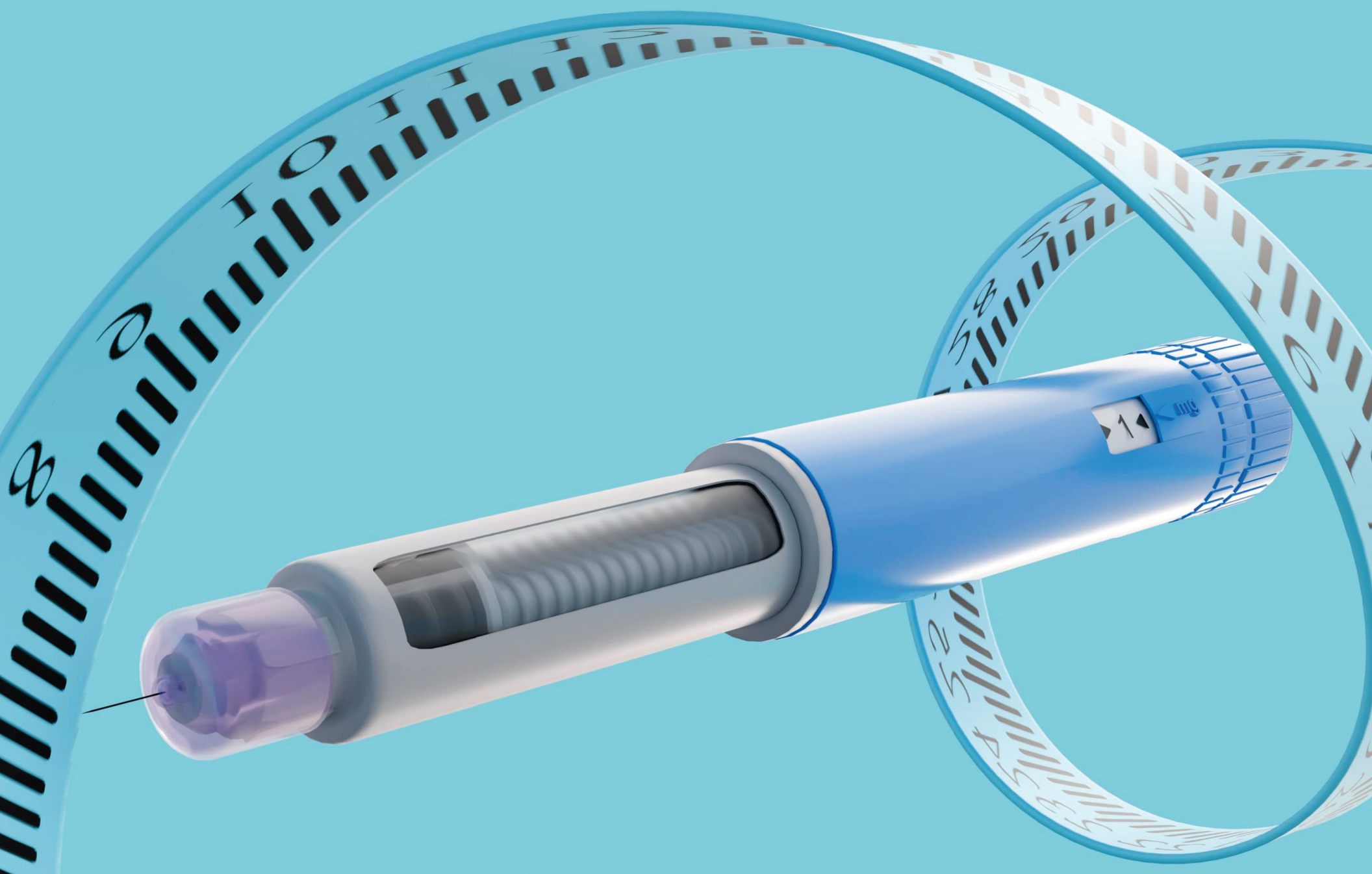
# HEALTH



# Ads for GLP-1 drugs are flooding the internet – here's how to know if it's safe to buy them online

**By SUJITH RAMACHANDRAN and LIANG-YUAN (CLAIRE) LIN**
University of Mississippi (The Conversation)

THE CONVERSATION

If you watched the Super Bowl in 2026, you likely saw Serena Williams share her weight loss journey on GLP-1 medications in a commercial.

Like millions of others around the country, if you've ever considered taking one of these drugs, you probably went online to learn more about where you can get them and how much they cost.

Online searches for GLP-1 medications like Ozempic and Wegovy have risen dramatically since 2022. Advertisements like Williams' Super Bowl commercial both reflect and help drive that growing demand.

More and more advertisements for weight loss medications are appearing in people's daily lives. These ads can be appealing, intrusive, confusing or even misleading, and have sparked widespread concerns about inappropriate use and adverse events. But the high cost of GLP-1 medications, combined with the lack of adequate coverage by insurance plans, has helped fuel a booming online market for cheaper alternatives.

As health services researchersstudying prescription medication safety, we are highly concerned about the risks of online advertisements selling alternative versions of GLP-1 weight loss medications.

## Not all GLP-1 medications are the same

As of April 2026, the most popular GLP-1 medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration include semaglutide, sold under the brand names Wegovy, Ozempic and Rybelsus; tirzepatide, sold as Mounjaro or Zepbound; and orforglipron, sold as Foundayo.

These brand-name medications have undergone rigorous clinical trials and extensive FDA evaluation, including review of clinical data, manufacturing processes and facility inspections, to ensure safety, quality and effectiveness.

Many of the GLP-1 drugs advertised on the internet are not the FDA-approved medications but rather "compounded" GLP-1 products made in compounding pharmacies. They contain the same active ingredient – semaglutide, tirzepatide or orforglipron – but add minor but clinically important modifications such as using a different salt form, adding different inactive ingredients and varying drug concentrations or dosages. In addition, they may be often produced and stored under inconsistent quality standards.

Compounding pharmacies are intended to create personalized versions of FDA-approved medications to meet unique patient needs that cannot be met through the mass-produced brand-name medications. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the modifications being made to GLP-1 medications sold by compounding pharmacies meet those criteria. Instead, companies are using compounding pharmacies to bypass the FDA-approvedmanufacturers and generate profit.

In February 2026, the FDA released a report alerting patients and providers about the risks of compounded GLP-1 medications.

The report notes the presence of counterfeit Ozempic, the use of non-FDA-approved ingredients such as retatrutide or cagrilintide, and products bypassing regulations by being labeled as "not for human consumption."

As of July 2024 – the most recently issued report – the FDA had received over 1,000 reports of adverse events related to compounded semaglutide and compounded tirzepatide. These include gastrointestinal effects like nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain, as well as fainting, headache, migraine, dehydration, acute pancreatitis and gallstones. These effects occur because drug concentrations in compounded medications can vary significantly, leading to serious dosing errors.

## Steps to safely obtain GLP-1 medications online

First, if you or someone you know is considering GLP-1 medications for weight management, it's important to know that leading medical organizations have specific recommendations for the use of these drugs. For instance, the American Diabetes Association only recommends the use of GLP-1 drugs for weight loss for those with a body mass index, or BMI, of at least 30, or among those with a BMI of 27 or greater if they have at least one other condition such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension or high cholesterol. People with a BMI below 27 need further clinical evaluation to determine if a GLP-1 medication is appropriate for them.

If you and your doctor determine that it is appropriate to seek GLP-1 medications for weight management, it is important to avoid compounded versions of GLP-1 drugs unless your health care provider specifically recommends them.

But identifying which GLP-1 medications are compounded can be challenging. It is important to carefully examine how the medication is labeled on the website.

Websites selling compounded versions of GLP-1 drugs are not allowed to use the FDA-approved brand names of products like Ozempic, Wegovy and Zepbound.

If a product description includes spelling errors or terms such as "compounded," "generic version" or "same active ingredient as [brand name]," it often indicates that the product is a compounded formulation. When in doubt, try contacting the online retailer and ask if the product is a compounded drug.

If you decide to obtain GLP-1 medications online, it is important to choose reliable and transparent sources. The manufacturers of several FDA-approved GLP-1 medications provide official online platforms such as Novocare and LillyDirect.

These allow people to get medication information and transparent pricing and to get the drugs delivered to them at home or to pick them up at a pharmacy. When possible, using these official sources can reduce the risk of encountering misleading advertisements or unverified products.

## Red flags

Online retailers that offer GLP-1 drugs without requiring a prescription or medical evaluation are illegal and unsafe. Advertising the ease of getting a prescription or only requiring an online form to obtain a prescription is a red flag. As a rule of thumb, patients should always begin their treatment by consulting with their local primary care provider who can evaluate their complete medical history.

It is also important to verify whether the pharmacy associated with the website is properly licensed and compliant with regulatory standards, since many online sellers rely on compounding pharmacies that are based outside the U.S. or are not appropriately licensed. Therefore, patients should check whether the pharmacy that will ship their medication has a physical address and a telephone number based in the U.S.

Patients should verify whether the pharmacy is registered on the official FDA database of approved compounded pharmacies and licensed as per the board of pharmacy of the state where the pharmacy is physically located.

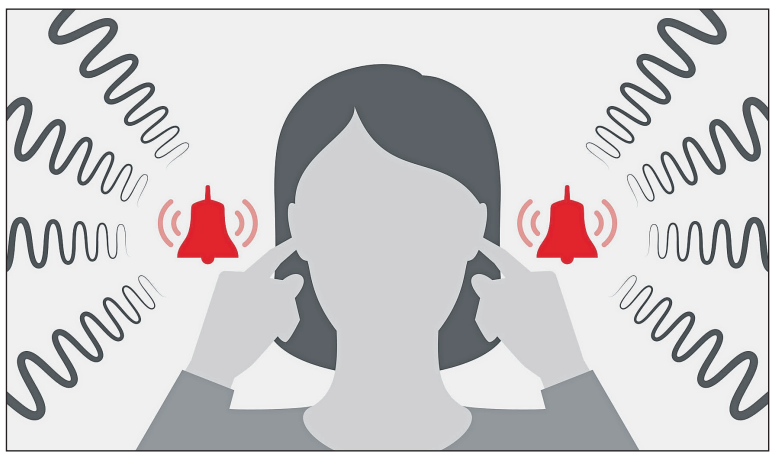
Using pharmacies that are not registered or licensed is highly unsafe and can result in serious adverse effects. If the online retailer does not clearly disclose which pharmacy they are using, you should contact the retailer to confirm this information.

Finally, even after you receive your medications, you will need to carefully review the product and its label. This can help determine whether the medication being offered corresponds to an FDA-approved product or a compounded formulation. Products that arrive without proper packaging, labeling or an expiration date, or have a foreign language on the packaging, may be unsafe or unverified products.

*Sujith Ramachandran is an associate professor of pharmacy administration at the University of Mississippi. Liang-Yuan (Claire) Lin is a Ph.D. candidate in pharmacy administration at the University of Mississippi.* *The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.*

# Tinnitus – merely annoying or a sign of something more serious?

**By KARL HILLE**
The Baltimore Sun (TNS)



Elena Abrazhevich / Dreamstime / TNS

BALTIMORE — That chirping sound could be birds celebrating spring, or it could be tinnitus – especially if it comes with anxiety, depression or difficulty sleeping.

The condition has many causes, and can signal deeper health or wellness issues, Dr. Briney Ometz, owner and provider at Anne Arundel Audiology, told The Baltimore Sun

"Tinnitus is a sound that you perceive, which could be a buzz or humming," she said. "A lot of times it's called a ringing, but it could be a lot of tones, or it could even sound like waves on a beach."

Its cause could be as simple as earwax pressing against the eardrum, perhaps by using a Q-tip – which is a big no-no, she said. Other causes include hearing loss, jaw misalignment, high blood pressure, inner ear disorders, certain medications and thyroid issues.

No simple cure exists, but treatments vary depending on the individual's ability to function and enjoy everyday activities. These include cognitive-behavioral therapy to help sufferers cope with their symptoms, or a specialized hearing aid that adjusts to the tinnitus signal. Masking devices are also available for people without hearing loss; they look like hearing aids but produce a sound to soften the perception of ringing or roaring. Cellphone apps that produce pleasant sounds like rain, night sounds, waves or white noise also can help improve sleep.

Tinnitus affects 50 million Americans, according to the American Tinnitus Association website, and can be temporary or chronic. As many as 2 million Americans find the sound debilitating, interfering with work, sleep or life activities. Findings published in the Dove Medical Journal last December linked the severity of tinnitus symptoms to the severity of depression and anxiety in sufferers.

Researchers at the National Institutes of Health and other institutions are developing new tinnitus treatments that stimulate the brain, head and neck areas using electric, sound, magnetic, and deep brain stimulation – placing electrodes deep within the brain to disrupt more harmful processes.

Regardless of the cause or side effects, Ometz said seeing a doctor is the first step toward customized relief as well as unmasking underlying health conditions.

"Tinnitus is not a disease; it's a symptom of another condition going on in your body."

**HEALTHQ**

Cleveland Clinic / TNS

**Eric Boose, a family medicine physician, uses AI software to document a patient's appointment.**

# Can I opt out of having my doctor take notes with AI?

**By KATHERINE RUPPELT, CARA ANTHONY and BLAKE FARMER**
Nashville Public Radio / KFF Health News (TNS)

Family physician Eric Boose has been using an artificial intelligence tool to get back to what he calls "old-fashioned medicine" – talking with patients face-to-face, without having to type into a computer at the same time.

"I can really just sit there and engage and just focus on them and listen," said Boose, who practices at Cleveland Clinic.

Roughly two years ago, he started using an AI notetaker app during patient visits. The tool listens while he talks with patients and then automatically generates a visit summary based on the conversation. The summary is usually ready within seconds after the appointment ends.

"It's taking care of all that tedious work of charting and taking notes during the visit," he said. "It's just freeing up a lot more time to get that done, and I can get home to my family earlier."

Nearly a third of physician practices are using AI scribes and others are working to add the tool, in an effort to cut down on administrative work.

If your practitioner suggests using an AI scribe at your next appointment, here are things to keep in mind.

### Clinicians should ask for your permission

At the start of an appointment, your doctor might ask something like, "Are you OK if I use an AI scribe to help me take notes during this appointment?" A common practice is to accept verbal, not written, consent from patients before turning the tool on. However, the legal requirements for getting permission to record a patient conversation vary by state.

Boose said you can ask to pause the AI scribe at any point, especially to discuss something sensitive. And if you decline altogether, your practitioner will likely return to taking manual notes on a computer.

### AI scribes make mistakes too, so check their work

Like other AI tools, medical scribes can "hallucinate," or spontaneously add errors into a record. AI scribes can also omit important information or miss context clues within a conversation.

Clinicians are supposed to review and edit the AI-generated visit summaries before adding them to a patient's record. As a patient, it's a good practice to carefully review your visit summary and contact your health provider if you notice errors.

### Yes, the AI company could use your data, with limitations

Companies and health systems that offer AI scribe tools have access to medical data and are subject to federal standards about how they use and store patient data, under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, more commonly known as HIPAA.

They may use data from your appointment to help improve their software without informing you, said Darius Tahir, who reports on health technology for KFF Health News. "If information is 'de-identified,' which can mean stripping it of identifiers [and] making sure it's not personally traceable back to people, then it is more free to be used in more ways," he said. "There are way fewer regulatory requirements."

If you want to know how your data is being used, ask either your practitioner or medical system for more information. But you might not get a clear answer, Tahir said.

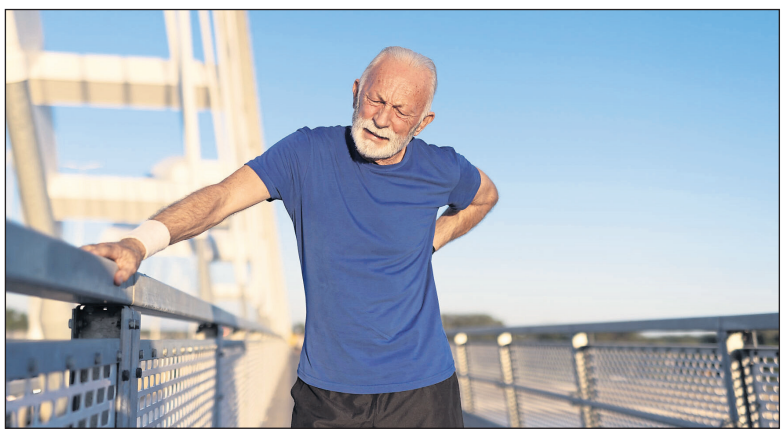
### People and policy

The U.S. health care system will likely continue to integrate AI technology into patient care. The Trump administration strongly supports the development and use of AI, especially in health care. In early 2025, President Donald Trump issued an executive order reducing existing regulations on AI to help the U.S. "retain global leadership of artificial intelligence." In December, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released an AI strategy stating that the department supports "integrating AI to modernize care and public health infrastructure to improve health at the individual and population levels."

*HealthQ is a health series from reporters Cara Anthony and Blake Farmer, approachable guides to an unapproachable health care system. It's a collaboration between Nashville Public Radio and KFF Health News. KFF Health News is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs of KFF – the independent source for health policy research, polling and journalism.*

# Outrunning sciatica

## Nerve problem threatened to derail a runner, until he learned how to sidestep the often-debilitating condition



Vladimir Vladimirov / Getty Images

**By ROBERTA BURKHART**
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

PITTSBURGH — As he trained for his first Pittsburgh Marathon last spring, Elam Gates thought he was doing everything right – building mileage, pushing his limits and chasing a new goal.

Then came the pain.

"A sudden, overnight issue" that began as twinges and tingling quickly turned into staggering nerve pain that originated in his lower back and shot down his leg, making it difficult for the 29-year-old Richland man to walk, let alone run.

The pain disrupted not just Gates' training, but daily life. He remembers one day leisurely walking with his wife in North Park: "I kept constantly having to tell her, 'Hey, I need to pause a second. I need to stretch my leg out, because it's really sore.'"

Gates had developed sciatica, a condition caused by irritation of a nerve in the lower spine.

While many runners encounter it at some point, medical experts say the condition is widely misunderstood. Running doesn't cause sciatica, but training can aggravate underlying weaknesses, imbalances or prior injuries. Recognizing symptoms early – and adjusting training accordingly – can be key to staying on the road.

Up to 40 percent of the population will develop sciatica at some point in their lives, according to Harvard Health, Henry Ford Health and other resources. And the likelihood of developing it increases as we age.

"It might help to talk about what sciatica is," said Jeff Fleming, associate medical director of the Pittsburgh Marathon and a UPMC primary care sports medicine doctor. "Sciatica is usually referring to irritation of a nerve, specifically one of the nerves that starts at your low back and goes down the length of your leg."

That irritation – often identified by a feeling of "pins and needles" or electricity – is most often caused by compression in the lumbar spine, he said. Sometimes there's also numbness, weakness and other symptoms.

While many runners experience sciatica at some point, both Fleming and Sewickley-based physical therapist Scott Szelong stress that running itself is not typically the root cause.

Instead, the condition reflects a broader reality: Low back pain and related nerve issues are common in the general population.

"We're bipedal individuals, right? So we bear most of our weight down through those lower segments," Szelong said. "So that's why you statistically see more dysfunction in the lower lumbar spine, and it presents with that sciatica distribution."

In fact, he noted, research and studies have shown that running can have positive effects on spinal health.

"Running has NOT been shown to adversely affect spine health," Szelong said in an email.

### When pain hits

For Bill Beckett, a 52-year-old endurance runner from near St. Clairsville, Ohio, sciatica traces back to a severe back injury with a few ruptured disks, long before he ever took up running.

His back surgery in 2017 had him "tied up, laid up for almost a year." After recovering, he turned to running to stay active – and eventually became an ultramarathoner, logging about 60 miles a week and competing in races across the country.

But the nerve pain never fully disappeared. Beckett manages flare-ups by closely monitoring his body and adjusting his training.

When he feels that something is off and not quite feeling right, he stops and makes adjustments immediately. "Whether it's the surface you're running on, or maybe cut back the number of miles you're running, or maybe it's time for a shoe change."

Shoes and terrain, he added, make a noticeable difference.

"Concrete is the absolute worst," Beckett said. "The asphalt, a little better." Trail running, in his opinion, is the best surface to reduce pounding on the body.

Gates' experience was very different, and came during his first marathon training cycle.

At the time, he had only recently taken up running but had quickly ramped up mileage.

"I had never pushed my body physically this much," he said.

A physical therapist diagnosed the disabling pain he was experiencing as sciatica and pointed to multiple contributing factors.

"Number one, just a general overuse," Gates said. Second, he was under-fueling his body, making recovery from the intense training harder.

One of the reasons Gates started running was an attempt at weight loss. So while his calorie reduction had succeeded in helping him shed close to 100 pounds, it also derailed his training for the race. After his bout with sciatica, he said he came to understand that, "in order to be efficient and be your best in life, you have to fuel properly."

With treatment and insight gleaned from physical therapy, Gates adjusted his approach.

The most common treatments for sciatica are conservative, non-surgical options including physical therapy, stretching and exercises, over-the-counter NSAID pain relievers like ibuprofen and naproxen, heat and ice therapy and continuing light activity, according to the Mayo Clinic. In some cases, doctors will prescribe a shot of a corticosteroid medication into the area around the affected nerve root or surgery to repair or correct herniated disks.

Now, Gates employs structured warmup and cooldown regimens, focuses on hip-strengthening drills in strength training routines and is more disciplined about post-run nutritional recovery.

Today, he's back on track and preparing for his second Pittsburgh Marathon on May 3 – this time with nearly double the training mileage and a focus on staying healthy. His goal this year is to shave at least five minutes off last year's finish of 3 hours 20 minutes.

### Why runners feel it

Running may not cause sciatica, but it can trigger symptoms – especially when underlying issues are present.

"A lot of it has to do with the repetitive motion of running," Fleming explained. A repetitive pounding of the lower back where the sciatic nerve originates "can cause that area to develop pressure on one of the nerves."

Other contributing factors include muscle imbalances, weak core muscles and prior injuries.

"Weakness in the muscles around the back and the core is probably the most common cause," he said.

Szelong emphasized the importance of "load management" – how much stress runners place on their bodies over time – as well as factors including training volume, lifestyle and biomechanics.

"A great predictor of injury is a prior episode of that injury," he said. With a prior history of back pain, "There is a greater risk of experiencing it again."

### The telltale symptoms

Sciatica tends to feel different from typical muscle strain.

"Usually nerve pain is very easy for people to describe," Fleming said. "It feels like burning or pins and needles or electricity, or like you're getting zapped."

Unlike other types of pain, true sciatica often travels below the knee and into the foot, following a specific nerve pathway.

"That's one of the few things that will cross beyond the knee and go down the entire leg," he explained.

### When to rest, when to worry

For runners, pushing through discomfort can be tempting. But that can lead to further problems.

"Rest from running is probably just the simplest thing that you can do," Fleming said.

For many, symptoms often resolve on their own, but worsening signs should not be ignored.

"If it gets more severe, it can cause numbness or even weakness in your leg," he said. If that happens, it's time to see a doctor and hang up the running shoes for a bit, he warned.

Certain "red flag" symptoms – including loss of bowel or bladder control or significant leg weakness – require urgent care.

### Strength, not just stretching

Prevention and recovery hinge on building strength – not just flexibility.

Exercises like squats, deadlifts and planks can help stabilize the core and reduce strain on the lower back, with Szelong noting that many runners overlook this aspect.

"Distance runners tend to avoid strength and plyometric training," he said, recommending a dynamic warmup before runs and individualized programming based on a runner's needs.

Ultimately, managing sciatica comes down to listening to the body and adjusting accordingly, he said.

Runners should vary surfaces, monitor training load and incorporate cross-training to stay resilient.

"It just makes you a little bit more rounded and less injury [prone]," Fleming said.

And while sciatica can be disruptive, it doesn't have to mean the end of running.

"Running itself hasn't been shown to be an adverse movement," Szelong said. "It's just a common pathology for a lot of folks."

# FINANCE

Paul Faith / AFP via Getty Images / TNS

Seamus Fahy, co-founder of Merrion vaults holds up a Swiss 100 gram gold bar at the Merrion vaults in Dublin on Jan. 7, 2019.

# *A new gold rush*

## States stockpile bars, encourage gold-backed debit cards

**By KEVIN HARDY**
Stateline.org (TNS)

More states are piling up gold bars, or encouraging residents to use gold-backed debit cards, to hedge against inflation.

Several states, including Western ones with rich mining histories, have been stockpiling gold as part of their broader state savings. And more states are looking to follow the lead of Texas and Florida by passing so-called transactional gold laws that would invite consumers to save and spend gold through their own accounts.

Critics question the need for these bills and some have panned them as potentially market-disrupting measures that could ultimately provide tax havens for the wealthy. But proponents say they can help bring gold to the masses and provide ordinary consumers an important protection against the creep of inflation, since gold has generally increased in value over time.

"Inflation is the carbon monoxide that you can't see, taste or smell," said Georgia state Sen. Marty Harbin, a Republican who sponsored bipartisan legislation this year that would have established gold and silver as legal tender and created an electronic payment system.

The state Senate approved that bill but it didn't advance beyond a House committee. Harbin said he expects to reintroduce it next session.

Oklahoma lawmakers are considering a similar measure that would create an electronic payment system backed by gold. Lawmakers in several states, including Arizona, Iowa and Mississippi, considered such legislation this year.

After vetoing a similar bill last year, Utah Republican Gov. Spencer Cox allowed a gold measure to become law this year without his signature. He said the legislature appeared intent on passing the bill despite his misgivings.

"Many are concerned that this will result in unwelcome government involvement in the gold market," he wrote in a statement late last month.

As part of transactional gold legislation, proponents are pushing for tax exemptions for precious metals, namely gold and silver. While interest on savings accounts or earnings on stock investments can be subject to state and federal taxes, gold proponents say precious metals should be free of tax because of their history as legal currency.

Matthew Gardner, a senior fellow at the left-leaning Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, said there's no reason gold should be taxed differently from other investment holdings. Governments generally provide capital gains tax breaks in hopes of spurring activities that grow the economy or create jobs. But Gardner said holding gold or other collectibles does no such thing.

"This as an economic activity has virtually no social benefits whatsoever," Gardner said. "You're trading a Pokémon card, basically."

If rising costs are the main concern, Gardner said, lawmakers should tackle inflation directly.

"Most people don't have the luxury of investing anything in gold," he said. "It's hard to imagine a way of inflation-proofing people's lives that is less accessible to most Americans than doing it with gold."

### Gold for the masses

The more Georgia Democratic state Sen. Sonya Halpern learned about transactional gold systems, the more appealing the idea became. While anyone can buy, hold or sell gold objects, she said emerging technology platforms allow consumers to own smaller shares of gold and spend it easily by swiping a card.

"It really does give you that instant liquidity of whatever gold holdings that you have," she said.

A cosponsor of Harbin's legislation, Halpern said she hoped gold could buffer Georgians against the shrinking buying power of the dollar. But she said she doesn't see it as replacing traditional savings and spending methods.

"I personally think that most people would see it as a complement to whatever they've already got going for their savings," she said, "and so it's just a piece of their overall ability to save and protect the dollars that they're working so hard to earn."

In Georgia, proponents cited Glint, a British firm that has been pushing legislation across several states in recent years. The company makes gold spendable for consumers by issuing prepaid debit cards that are backed by physical holdings in Swiss vaults.

Customers use currency to fund their accounts in advance, and Glint says they then outright own the physical gold in their account. When they use their Glint card for a purchase, the equivalent amount of gold is sold on their behalf and converted to U.S. dollars, or another currency, that go to the merchant.

Harbin, the Republican sponsor in Georgia, held up his Glint card and described the ease of purchasing his lunch at Chick-fil-A.

"I saw that the proof of concept was there," he told Stateline.

The Sound Money Defense League, a group that advocates for restoring gold and silver as America's currency, has fought Harbin's proposal and similar measures.

Jp Cortez, the group's executive director, said the existing debit card system was actually evidence that the legislation was unnecessary.

"It's not enabling anything that isn't already legal," said Cortez, whose organization is owned by Money Metals Exchange, an online broker for precious metals. "On top of that, the way these bills are written, frankly, read to me to be self-serving or written by self-interested vendors."

Aside from boosting particular firms, Cortez said, legislation proposed in several states would create a new government program that would put off many gold owners, who tend to be suspicious of government. He said there's also little demand to spend gold, which owners often view as a long-term asset that will gain value over time.

"The mentality of a gold owner is not one that says, 'I want more government involvement in my gold,'" Cortez said.

In an email to Stateline, Glint COO Jason Ollivier said legislation is not necessary for consumers to use the platform, which has been operating in the United States for more than six years. But new state laws do help legitimize and scale the technology, he said.

"These laws aim to remove friction, particularly around legal tender status and regulatory clarity, and make gold more usable for everyday transactions across a broader population," Ollivier wrote.

Inflation is driving the current wave of legislator interest, he said. And products such as Glint can provide consumers access to small amounts of gold, which currently trades for nearly $5,000 per ounce.

"Transactional gold allows consumers to accumulate small amounts over time, helping preserve purchasing power," Ollivier wrote. "Gold is a hedge and a store of value, not a high-yield investment; its role is stability, not speculation."

### States boosting gold

In Utah, the law enacted this year without the governor's signature requires the state to create a precious metals-backed electronic payment system to pay state vendors.

Utah State Treasurer Marlo Oaks said the system will be voluntary for state contractors, but officials hope it helps build out the emerging gold market.

"The idea, I think, is that if the state is involved in something like this, then it can add legitimacy to the idea," he said. "And can hopefully put proper guardrails around this sort of thing and advance the market in a way that is positive and helpful."

Oaks also said he hopes state involvement will help challenge federal tax policy.

In 1971, President Richard Nixon effectively ended the gold standard, which tied the value of the U.S. dollar to physical gold. After, the IRS began treating gold holdings like other collectibles, subject to income taxes upon sale.

"That's an important element, because suddenly if you're using (gold) like it used to be used, then we need to think about the treatment of taxes differently," Oaks said.

He led a 2024 workgroup of Utah officials studying how precious metals could "bolster long-term fiscal stability." In addition to inflation, the group examined how the ballooning federal debt consumes more tax revenues and could threaten state coffers.

A 2024 law allowed the treasurer to invest up to 10 percent of the state's reserve funds at the time in gold. Oaks said Utah currently has about $1.4 billion in reserves, including about $178 million worth of gold held in a privately operated vault.

It's among several states that are stockpiling gold. Created by 2015 legislation, the Texas Bullion Depository is the nation's first state-administered precious metals depository, the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts says. In Wyoming, a private firm is now storing state-owned gold worth millions of dollars, following enactment of a law last year.

Chris Colson, who researches payments trends at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, said it's too early to tell how lasting the current gold rush will prove. He noted that new transactional gold laws do not require customers or merchants to use gold. But he said many details surrounding taxes, fees and oversight remain to be determined.

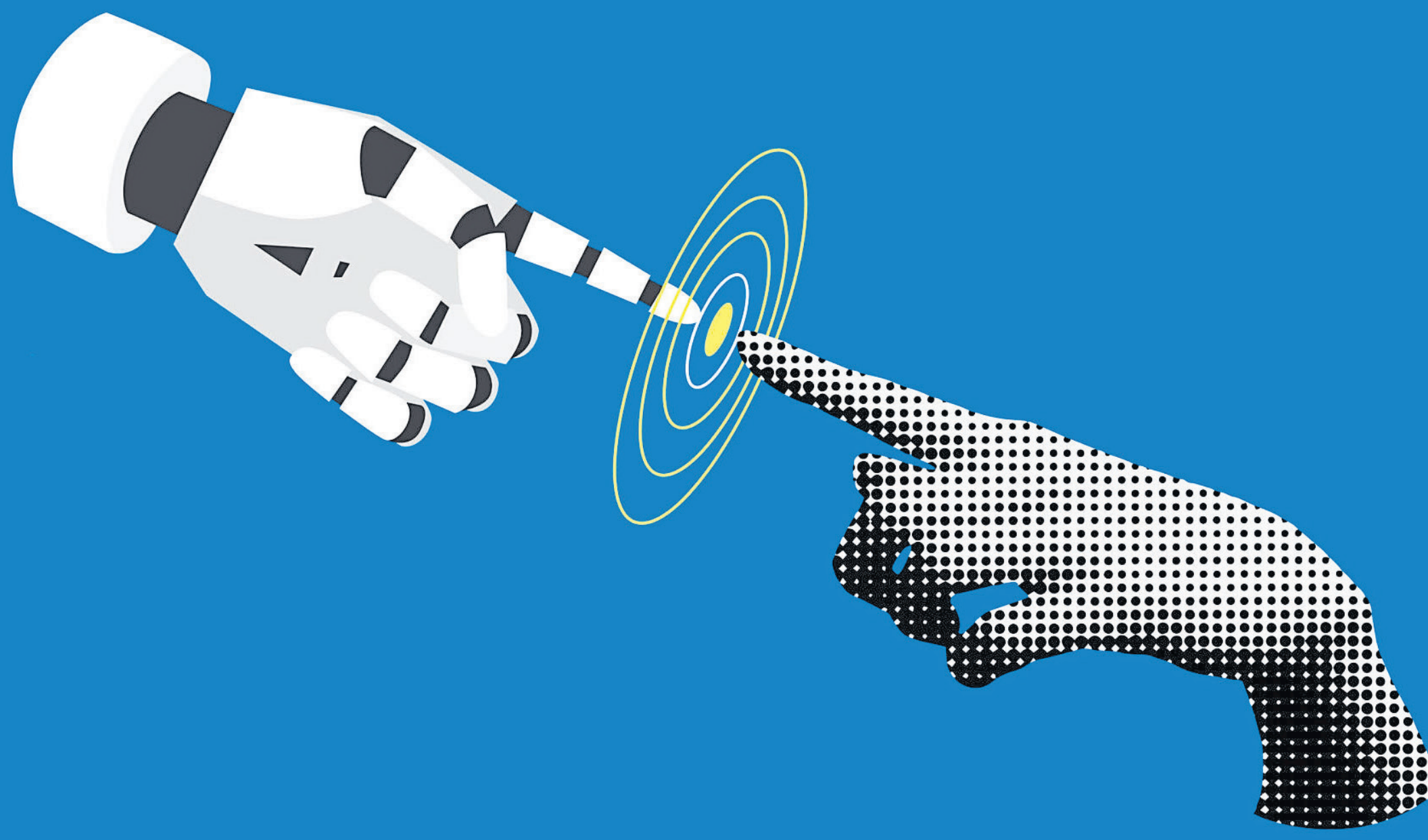
"With any good innovation, you don't necessarily want to clamp it down at the beginning, because then nothing happens, right?" he said. "So I think as people use it and things happen – positive and negative – it'll start to tighten up a little bit."

He likens the rise of gold-backed payment systems to that of Stablecoin, a type of cryptocurrency tied to existing currency like the U.S. dollar. That form of payment is still relatively rare, but it did gain traction with adoption from major credit card companies.

"I would imagine this will follow a similar route, meaning someone will make it available, and then the market will kind of bear who and how it's going to be used," he said. "I think we're just really at the starting line with this."

*Stateline reporter Kevin Hardy can be reached at khardy@stateline.org.*

*Stateline is part of States Newsroom, a national nonprofit news organization focused on state policy.*



Alona Horkova / Getty Images

# Industries most exposed to AI are not only seeing productivity gains but jobs and wage growth too

**By CHRISTOS MAKRIDIS**
Arizona State University; Institute for Humane Studies (The Conversation)

Forecasts of the impact of artificial intelligence range from the apocalyptic to the utopian. An October 2025 report from Senate Democrats, for example, predicted AI will destroy millions of U.S. jobs. A couple of years earlier, consultant company McKinsey forecast AI will add trillions to the global economy, while emphasizing job losses can be mitigated by training workers to do new things.

The problem is that many of these claims are based on projections, overly simplified surveys or thought experiments rather than observed changes in the economy. That makes it hard for the public, and often policymakers, to know what to trust.

As a labor economist who studies how technology and organizational change affect productivity and well-being, I believe a better place to start is with actual data on output, employment and wages – which are all looking relatively more hopeful.

## AI and jobs

In one of my new research papers with economist Andrew Johnston, we studied how exposure to generative AI affected industries across America between 2017 and 2024, using administrative data that covers nearly all employers. Our analysis covered a crucial period when generative AI use exploded, allowing us to analyze the effect within businesses and industries.

We measured AI exposure using occupation-level task data matched to each industry and state's occupational workforce mix prior to the pandemic. A state and industry with more workers in roles requiring language processing, coding or data tasks scored higher on exposure, for example, compared with one with more plumbers and electricians.

We then took that exposure ranking by occupation and looked at changes in the standard deviation in occupational exposure, comparing that with labor market and GDP across states and industries from 2017 to 2024.

Think of a standard deviation as roughly the gap between a paramedic – whose work centers on physical assessment, emergency response and hands-on care that AI cannot easily replicate – and a public relations manager, whose work involves drafting communications, analyzing sentiment and synthesizing information that AI tools handle well. That gap in AI exposure is roughly what we're measuring when we ask: Does being on the higher-exposure side of that divide change your industry's trajectory?

This data allowed us to answer two questions: When AI tools became widely available following the public release of ChatGPT in late 2022, did states and industries that were more exposed to generative AI become more productive, and what happened to workers?

Our answers are more encouraging, and more nuanced, than much of the public debate suggests.

We found that industries in states that were more exposed to AI experienced faster productivity growth beginning in 2021 – before ChatGPT reached the public – driven by enterprise tools already embedded in professional workflows, including GitHub Copilot for software development, Jasper for marketing and content writing, and Microsoft's GPT-3-powered business applications. In 2024, for example, industries whose AI exposure was one standard deviation higher saw gains of 10 percent in productivity, 3.9 percent in jobs and 4.8 percent in wages than comparable industries in the same state.

Those patterns suggest that, at least so far, AI has acted as a productivity-enhancing tool that boosts employment and wages rather than a simple substitute for labor.

## Augmentation versus displacement

A crucial distinction in the data is between tasks where AI works with people and tasks where AI can act more independently. In sectors where AI mainly complements workers – think marketing, writing or financial analysis – our data show that employment rose by about 3.6 percent per standard deviation increase in exposure.

In sectors where AI can execute tasks more autonomously – including basic data processing, generating boilerplate code, or handling standardized customer interactions – we found no significant employment change, though workers in those roles saw slower wage growth.

What these findings suggest is that when AI lowers the cost of completing a task and raises worker productivity, companies expand output enough to increase their demand for labor overall – the same logic that explains why power tools didn't eliminate construction workers.

The economic question is not whether any given task disappears. It is whether businesses and workers can reorganize fast enough to create new productive combinations. And so far, in most sectors, our evidence suggests they can.

But state policies also matter: These benefits were concentrated in the states with more efficient labor markets, meaning that the impact of generative AI on workers and the economy also depends on the types of policies and institutions of the local economy.

Importantly, these findings hold beyond occupational exposure. In additional work with co-authors at the Bureau of Economic Analysis, we found a similar effect on GDP and employment when looking at actual AI utilization – that is how often workers use AI. Drawing on the Gallup Workforce Panel, we measured workers actively using AI daily or multiple times a week. We found that each percentage-point increase in the share of frequent AI users in a state and industry is associated with roughly 0.1 percent to 0.2 percent higher real output and 0.2 percent to 0.4 percent higher employment.

To put that in context: The share of frequent AI users across all occupations rose from about 12 percent in mid-2024 to 26 percent by late 2025, a shift our estimates suggest corresponds to roughly 1.4 percent to 2.8 percent higher real output – or about 1 to 2 percentage points of annualized growth over that period.

New technologies rarely leave work untouched. But they also rarely eliminate the need for human contribution altogether. Instead, they change the composition of work, as our research shows. Some tasks shrink. Others expand. New ones emerge that were previously too costly or too hard to perform at scale. Put simply, some occupations might go away, but most of them just change.

If anything, the trends documented here are likely to strengthen rather than fade. Not only are generative AI tools rapidly improving, but also the experimentation and research and development that many workers and companies are engaging in are likely to pay large dividends. These investments – often referred to as intangible capital – tend to get unlocked a few years after a technology comes onto the scene, once complementary investments have been made.

## The role of companies and managers

Whether AI leads to anxiety or adaptation for workers depends in part on what happens inside organizations. Using additional data collected over many years in the Gallup Workforce Panel covering more than 30,000 U.S. employees from 2023 to 2026, I found in a 2026 paper that workplace adoption of generative AI rose quickly over the period, with the share of workers using AI often increasing from 9 percent to 26 percent.

But the more important finding is that adoption was far more common where workers believed their organization had communicated a clear AI strategy and where employees said they trust leadership. This suggests that growing adoption and effective use of AI depends not only on the availability of the technology but on whether managers make its use clear, credible and safe.

Where that clarity exists, frequent AI use is associated with higher engagement and job satisfaction, and it even reverses the burnout penalties that appear elsewhere.

In other words, the broader economic effects of AI depend not only on how sophisticated the tools are but on whether companies and managers create environments where workers can experiment, reorganize tasks and integrate new tools into productive routines. That is, if employees do not feel the psychological safety to experiment, they are less likely to use AI, and they are especially less likely to use it for higher-value work.

That is precisely the kind of adaptation that I believe makes labor markets more resilient than the most alarmist forecasts suggest.

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# FOOD

# 4 asparagus recipes bring bright, seasonal flavor

By GRETCHEN MCKAY
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

There's something about the letter A that just makes someone, or something, feel more important.

It's the first letter a toddler learns in the alphabet song, as well as proof of a job well done from a teacher. It's also a pretty important vowel that's necessary for the pronunciation of countless words and sentence construction.

A also marks the beginning of something. In the vegetable world in spring, that means one thing: those long, green spears with the grassy flavor we know as asparagus.

Sorry artichokes, aubergines and other veggies at the head of the line in an alphabetical list. We know you're great, too, but asparagus rules supreme when winter melts into spring, the sky is finally blue and all we want on the dinner table is something that tastes fresh and earthy and super-seasonal.

Whether or not its consumption causes a stink (if you know, you know!), we love this nutrient-rich member of the lily family for so many reasons. Not only is it extremely versatile – it can be steamed, grilled, roasted or be eaten raw – but the veggie plays nice with just about every protein, grain, eggs and dairy. That makes it easy to tuck into your favorite dish to give it a bright, spring flavor, be it pasta or a stir-fry, a pan bake or skillet dish, or a soup or chowder.

It's also pretty nutritious for something that has just 3 (!) calories per spear. A good source of antioxidants, a serving of asparagus also provides vitamins and minerals like vitamins A, C, E, K and B6, along with folate, iron, copper, calcium, protein and gut-friendly soluble and insoluble fiber so long as you don't cook the heck out of it.

Its only drawback – and this is a minor concern that's easily corrected by fast eating – is that it's a delicate, highly perishable vegetable that should be used within a day or two or purchase.

How to choose the best bunches? Look for strong spears that have closed, compact, tight heads. If a stalk snaps instead of flopping when it's bent in half, it's fresh! The base should also look juicy and freshly cut instead of dried out, and your eyes should be dazzled by its vibrant green color (unless you're buying purple or white asparagus, which also should be vibrant). And if it's slimy or withered? Wait for the next crop to come in.

Whether you choose pencil-thin stalks or opt for ones that are thicker is a matter of preference; if they're young, they'll be equally tender. (Rather than a sign of freshness, thickness is just a sign of the age of the root bed.)

To prep your asparagus for whatever you're cooking, trim the bottom ends first, and then wash the spears thoroughly. If you simply must wait a day or two to use them, stand the stalks upright in 2 inches of cold water or wrap them in a damp paper towel.

To get you started, we've gathered four asparagus recipes that go above and beyond standard expectations and make the most of the fleeting (local) asparagus season. All should earn the cook an A not just for effort, but also taste, texture and versatility.

They include a creamy risotto topped with peppery arugula; a custardy frittata that comes together in about 10 minutes; a light and airy tempura dish that will get kids to eat their vegetables; and a vegetal take on a Caesar salad.

## Asparagus and Arugula Risotto
**Serves 6**

Risotto takes a little time, but it's fairly easy to prepare if you're patient – just stir, stir and stir some more.

I added asparagus and arugula microgreens for color, but you could substitute peas or use no vegetables at all.

Be sure to use Arborio rice, a starchy short-grain rice that cooks to a creamy consistency. You can find it in most larger grocery stores and Italian markets.

**6-7 cups chicken, vegetable or garlic broth or stock, as needed**
**Salt and freshly ground pepper**
**2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil**
**2 shallots, minced**
**8 ounces cremini (baby bella) mushrooms, sliced**
**2 garlic cloves, minced**
**1 1/2 cups Arborio rice**
**1/2 cup dry white wine**
**1 cup of asparagus slices**
**2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley**
**1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese**
**Handful arugula microgreens for garnish**

In large stockpot, bring stock or broth to simmer. Season to taste with additional salt and pepper, if necessary, and keep it simmering on the stove.

Heat oil in a wide, heavy nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add shallots and cook, stirring often, until softened and aromatic, 3-5 minutes.

Turn up heat and add sliced mushrooms. Cook, stirring frequently, until they begin to sweat, about 3 minutes, then add garlic.

Cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Season with salt and pepper and continue to cook over medium heat until. Taste and adjust seasoning.

Add rice and stir until grains are evenly coated in oil and toasted but not browned, 3-4 minutes. Add wine and cook, stirring, until wine has almost evaporated.

Add enough simmering stock to just cover the rice. The stock should bubble slowly. Cook, stirring often and vigorously, until stock is just about absorbed.

Add another ladle or two of stock and continue cooking, stirring often and adding more stock when rice is almost dry, for 15 minutes.

Add asparagus and continue adding stock and stirring for another 10 minutes. Rice should be tender all the way through but still al dente. Taste and adjust seasoning.

Add another ladle or two of stock to rice. Stir in chopped parsley and grated Parmesan, and remove from heat.

Season with a little more pepper, if desired, and garnish with arugula microgreens, if using.

Serve right away in wide bowls or on plates.

*Gretchen McKay, Post-Gazette*

## Asparagus Frittata
**Serves 2-4**

A frittata is the Italian version of an omelet. Crustless and open-faced, it's cooked on the stovetop in a nonstick pan. Think of it as an egg pizza.

**FOR GRILLED ASPARAGUS:**
**1 pound asparagus**
**2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil**
**1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice**
**1 garlic clove, smashed**
**12 fresh mint leaves, sliced into thin ribbons**
**Fine sea salt and freshly ground black pepper**
**FOR THE FRITTATA:**
**4 large eggs**
**2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for serving**
**Fine sea salt and freshly ground black pepper**
**2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil**
**Fresh mint leaves, for garnish**

Grill asparagus: Snap tough, wood ends off asparagus and rinse spears thoroughly. Slice any thicker spears lengthwise, leaving the slender ones whole.

Place spears in large bowl and dress with olive oil, lemon juice,garlic and sliced mint.

Toss gently to coat and allow to marinate for about 30 minutes.

Heat a cast-iron grill pan over high heat. A few drops of water should bounce and evaporate quickly when pan is hot enough.

Grill asparagus in batches until tender, slightly bendy and charred in spots, about 3 minutes. Transfer to plate and season with salt and pepper.

Make frittata: In bowl, beat eggs until smooth. Add grated cheese and season with a generous pinch of salt and several grinds of pepper.

Place a 9- or 10-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Pour in olive oil until it shimmers.

Arrange the grilled asparagus in a single layer in pan. Pour the egg mixture over the asparagus and gently shake pan to evenly distribute it. Scatter over torn mint leaves.

Cook the frittata over medium heat until the edges are set, the bottom is golden and the top is still slightly wet, 6-8 minutes.

Invert a large plate over the pan and, in one quick motion, flip the frittata into place. Return the pan to the stove, slide the frittata back into the pan and cook for another 2-3 minutes, until fully set.

Slide frittata onto a serving plate, flipping it so the nicest side with the neatly lined-up asparagus faces up. Sprinkle with more grated cheese and serve immediately.

*"Vegetables the Italian Way: Turning Simple and Fresh into Extraordinary" by Giulia Scarpaleggia (Artisan, $35)*

## Asparagus Tempura
**Serves 4-6**

If you want to get kids to eat something, it almost always works to dip it in batter and fry it. This crispy, deep-fried appetizer features a light batter made with just two ingredients: flour and beer. (I used a hazy cherry IPA I found in the fridge.)

**1 pound asparagus, trimmed to 6 inches**
**Neutral oil, such as canola or vegetable, for deep-frying**
**FOR BATTER:**
**1 12-ounce bottle beer**
**1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour**
**For dipping sauce**
**3 tablespoons mirin**
**1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons soy sauce**
**3 tablespoons water**

Make batter: Combine beer and flour in a large bowl and stir together just until a batter forms; do not over mix. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use.

Prepare tempura: Heat 3 inches of oil to 400 degrees in a large deep saucepan over medium-high heat, or use a deep fryer.

Working in batches, dip asparagus spears in the batter, letting the excess drip off.

Carefully add to hot oil and fry until batter is deep golden. Using a slotted spoon or skimmer, transfer the asparagus to a cooling rack or a plate lined with paper towels. Make sure to let the oil return to 400 degrees before adding next batch.

Serve tempura with the dipping sauce, lime wedges and maldon salt.

*Adapted from "Vegetables Unleashed" by Jose Andres*

## Grilled Asparagus Caesar
**Serves 4**

I fried the croutons in olive oil instead of baking them in this easy Caesar recipe from cookbook author Mark Bittman. I also tossed them in grated Parmesan instead of nutritional yeast and used regular mayonnaise instead of vegan.

**8 ounces rustic whole-grain bread, torn into 1-inch pieces**
**8 tablespoons olive oil**
**Salt and pepper**
**1 tablespoon grated Parmesan cheese**
**2 medium zucchini, sliced into 1/2-inch coins**
**1 pound asparagus, trimmed of woody ends**
**1 large garlic clove, halved**
**1 tablespoon drained capers**
**1/4 cup mayonnaise**
**2 tablespoons red wine vinegar**
**1 teaspoon soy sauce**
**2 hearts romaine lettuce, or 1 small head, rinsed, drained and chopped**
**1 small red onion, halved and sliced**

Preheat oven broiler.

Make croutons: Heat 2 tablespoon olive oil in a small saucepan. When sizzling, add bread cubes and a generous pinch of salt, and cook, tossing often, until the cubes are brown and toasty.

Remove croutons to bowl and toss them with grated Parmesan cheese and set aside while you prepare salad.

Put zucchini and asparagus on a rimmed baking sheet and drizzle with 2 tablespoons oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, and toss to coat.

When broiler is ready, broil the vegetables until they are tender and charred, turning them as necessary to prevent burning, 6-10 minutes for the aparagus and 10-15 minutes for the zucchini.

Rub a large bowl with the garlic. Cut the vegetables into bite-sized pieces and transfer to bowl. (I used a ceramic bowl and minced the garlic and added to bowl along with the veggies.)

Put capers in a small bowl and mash them with a fork. Add mayonnaise, the vinegar and soy sauce and sprinkle with salt and lot of back pepper. Whisk to combine, then whisk continuously while you slowly pour in the remaining 4 tablespoons oil.

Taste and adjust seasoning.

To serve, add lettuce and onion to the grilled vegetables, drizzle with half the dressing or more to taste, and scatter some croutons on top.

Toss, adding more dressing or croutons if you like, and serve. Pass the remaining dressing and croutons at the table.

*"Dinner for Everyone" by Mark Bittman*

# ENTERTAINMENT

Emma McIntyre / Getty Images for Coachella / TNS

Cameron Winter of Geese performs at the Gobi stage during the 2026 Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival at Empire Polo Club on April 11 in Indio, California.

# Why musicians are *manufacturing* sold-out shows

**By DREW MILLARD**
Bloomberg News (TNS)

Within the indie rock world, the Brooklyn, New York, band Geese was undoubtedly the breakout success story of the past year. After releasing their critically acclaimed record "Getting Killed," the precocious zoomers embarked on a national tour of midsize venues across the U.S., each show to a sold-out crowd.

Thanks to the success of "Getting Killed" – and mounting fascination with the band's frontman, Cameron Winter – ticket demand went through the roof, pushing resale prices on sites such as StubHub and SeatGeek to $2,000 in some cities. Given how far in advance tours are planned, that kind of secondary market action would have been hard to predict when booking venues, just as it's hard to know which band will blow up next. That it was almost immediately prohibitively expensive to see the hottest band in the U.S. live, though, has itself become part of the Geese narrative. While it's impossible to intentionally replicate the group's mainstream breakthrough – the discourse around which has now entered conspiracy theory territory – the music industry does have some leeway when it comes to lining up a string of sold-out dates.

Enter the underplay. Within the industry, the term is shorthand for booking an artist to play at a venue whose capacity is lower than the number of tickets the artist can be reasonably expected to sell. Historically underplays were used to perform under the radar for a number of reasons. They can help artists circumvent radius clauses that certain venues (often festivals) impose, or test out new music in front of an intimate crowd.

But lately the underplay has emerged as a key tool available to artists and the teams behind them. "When you put the ceiling really low on the capacity of a show, it kind of becomes speculative," says Ric Leichtung, a longtime Brooklyn music promoter who describes it as creating an idea of perpetual demand and growth. Today's sold-out tour is tomorrow's festival slot, or placement in an au courant film or TV show, which then becomes the foundation for a platinum record or high-grossing stadium tour.

The pandemic also changed the dynamics of booking live events. When artists resumed performing after lockdowns, there was industrywide uncertainty over how quickly the market could recover. In October 2022, high-profile indie acts Santigold and Animal Collective canceled tours meant to promote their respective albums, citing the inflation-induced increased costs of touring as well as uncertainty about the health of both performers and audience members.

Others opted to play it safe, picking venues they'd filled in the past even if demand for larger shows might have existed. A cohort of new musicians, many of them in their teens, emerged from isolation having blown up online but without the sort of live performance experience that gives an artist an understanding of how to command the stage in a big room. And with even the most seasoned performers needing to shake off rust, the only reasonable thing to do was to proceed with caution. Leichtung says the industrywide thinking became "the right venue is the one that sells out."

There are also practical reasons to shoot for sellouts in smaller rooms. "When bands have a bunch of sold-out shows on their Instagram, it drives sales for other markets," says Zachary Cepin, a booking agent at High Road Touring. Creating a sense of urgency certainly helps, as does playing a small, packed room with a rabid crowd, filming it and disseminating the footage on social media.

It wasn't always this way, says Dylan Baldi, a Philadelphia-based musician best known as the singer and guitarist of the band Cloud Nothings. When Baldi, now in his 30s, began touring in his late teens, he says, "we'd just go out and play a bunch of shows. Some of them were sold out, which was great, but it was never like, 'If this doesn't sell out, the tour's ruined.'"

Baldi is also of a generation of indie musicians for whom industry-focused events such as South by Southwest, in Austin, Texas, and CMJ Music Marathon, in New York City, functioned almost like the NFL Scouting Combine for emerging acts. Artists hoping to get noticed would pack absurd numbers of sets into the dayslong, multivenue affairs, tacitly betting that, in the aggregate, they'd perform in front of enough label people, publicists, agents, managers, tastemakers and journalists that someone with sway would help make something happen. Today, SXSW is vastly more integral to the film and tech industries, and CMJ no longer exists.

In lieu of centralized industry showcases, says Leichtung, up-and-coming artists and their teams often pick key shows meant to present the artist in the most flattering light, regardless of size. "The flagship shows of an artist's narrative typically happen in New York or Los Angeles, and often happen in rooms that are much smaller than everywhere else they're playing in the country," they say.

That these shows just so happen to occur in the markets where much of the music industry and press live only further serves to illustrate the power of the underplay: Rather than taking advantage of these cities' vast populations of culture-savvy young people to sell as many tickets as possible today, artists opt to pack a smaller room with the right crowd to maximize the hype – increasing the likelihood of big opportunities tomorrow.

On a certain level, all of this seems a bit sneaky. And it gets sneakier. Leichtung notes that venues including East Williamsburg's Brooklyn Steel and Union Transfer in Philadelphia have installed retractable stages to manipulate their capacity. "You can go from a room that could sell out about 1,800 tickets down to 1,200," they say. Venues can cut capacity even further through canny placement of curtains, restricting access to balconies, and other visual tricks to make the room seem smaller than it is – with the aim of being able to declare a show "sold out" if ticket sales surpass a certain threshold but interest has stalled.

But this focus on filling rooms over maxing out ticket sales has the potential to create a misalignment of incentives between artists and venues, especially ones owned by behemoths such as Live Nation Entertainment Inc. that also operate ticketing platforms. While Live Nation Chief Executive Officer Michael Rapino argued last fall that concert tickets are "underpriced" compared with sporting events, a federal jury last week found Live Nation illegally monopolized the live-events industry, opening the door to a potential breakup of its Ticketmaster business.

Similarly, there's an argument to be made that when a venue futzes with its layout to lower its capacity, it's placing an artificial cap on alcohol sales as well as ticket sales. And when an artist books too small a show, the uncaptured value leaks onto the secondary market, where fans face high prices or miss out altogether.

Manufacturing sold-out shows, however, can also help counter the risk of leaving money on the table while ensuring both artist and audience have the best possible experience at the gig, says Cepin of High Road Touring. He cites a string of dates he booked for the legendary and idiosyncratic singer-songwriter Jonathan Richman, formerly of the Modern Lovers, at Baby's All Right in Brooklyn.

Although Richman, now in his 70s, likely could have played a much larger venue than the 330-capacity hipster mainstay, Cepin felt that putting him there was a statement of his continued relevance with younger audiences. "It makes him look really cool," he says. "There's probably not a lot of other people his age playing Baby's."

To make sure Richman wasn't taking a haircut on potential earnings, Cepin booked eight performances at the venue, initially announced four, then waited for each to sell out before revealing the rest. "It's not necessarily set up to even be an underplay," he explains. "You don't announce all eight shows at once, because you want to make sure the demand is there."

In the age of easily faked view and stream counts, armies of artificial intelligence agents and bots in comment sections, as well as paid playlist placements, it's hard to discern an artist's true popularity – or even potential – from data alone. The real-life experience of seeing an artist live, meanwhile, is harder to fake. Sure, the conditions can be optimized, to put it charitably, but the appearance of a packed room can help both performer and audience have the best possible time.

"It's a weird system," says Cloud Nothings' Baldi, noting with a laugh that he'd recently been told his band was doing an underplay at a venue that, "to us, was kind of just a play." He adds: "The whole thing is fake in a way. But at the heart of it, people are playing music and other people are enjoying it."

MOVIE REVIEW

Courtesy of Lionsgate / TNS

Jaafar Jackson stars as Michael Jackson in the movie "Michael."

# *'Michael'* an uncanny yet shallow portrayal of King of Pop's rise

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

There are many uncanny things in "Michael," the Michael Jackson biopic directed by Antoine Fuqua, that literally made my jaw drop. For example, Miles Teller's eyebrows, inexplicably tinted and placed. He plays John Branca, the bulldog entertainment lawyer Michael Jackson hires to fire his abusive father/manager. Then there's the computer-generated menagerie that Michael keeps on his family's Encino compound, Hayvenhurst, including Bubbles the chimp, a giraffe and a llama in whom he often confides.

But by far the most uncanny, jaw-dropping element of "Michael" is the startling central performance, delivered by Jackson clan scion Jaafar Jackson, the son of Jermaine Jackson, who portrays his uncle Michael in the film. The producers (members of the Jackson family and inner circle) are extremely lucky to have Jaafar, who bears those Jackson looks, and conjures a physical embodiment of the King of Pop that is eerily, almost mathematically correct. He nails every pop, point, slide and moonwalk; the voice, the gestures and set of his mouth: a grimace of effort on stage, a tight smile off, a genuine toothy grin for the cameras. Genetics might be on Jaafar Jackson's side, but there's also tremendous amount of hard work that has gone into this performance, which is technically perfect if a bit emotionally shallow.

That sums up the whole "Michael" endeavor, a film that begins and ends in 1988 with a triumphant Wembley performance of "Bad" and leaves the audience with the hilariously vague parting words "his story continues" – the understatement of the year. Perhaps the Jackson family were hoping that the film would attract new fans to Michael's undeniably amazing music, and that they wouldn't go digging any further, simply enjoying the story of a quirky genius who emerges from a traumatic, abusive upbringing as a child star to write, record and perform some of the greatest songs of all time, up until 1988.

John Logan's script doesn't just skirt the biggest, ugliest parts of Michael Jackson's story, it almost rewrites history in its selectiveness. Whole siblings are left out (Janet and Randy), and ending when it does, the film avoids the main events of Jackson's tabloid-scrutinized life, from his marriage to Lisa Marie Presley, unconventional family planning, untimely death, and of course, the elephant in the room, the horrifying sexual abuse allegations detailed in the docuseries "Leaving Neverland." "His story continues" – well, it certainly did.

**'Michael'**

★★

**MPA rating:** PG-13 (for some thematic material, language, and smoking)

**Running time:** 2:07

**How to watch:** In theaters

The film also doesn't give us much about the rest of the Jacksons, even though they're onscreen plenty. Then again, the film is titled "Michael," not "Michael, Tito, Jermaine and Marlon." The only other character who shares Michael's story equally is patriarch Joe, played with simmering menace by an always excellent Colman Domingo. With a narrative confined to the early years, the film focuses on Michael getting out from under the thumb of his controlling, abusive father in order to live his own life and make his own music. As soon as Michael attains a modicum of power, he dispatches white men like Branca and various record executives to fight his battles with his father for him.

"Michael" presents Michael as a lonely oddball genius unfortunately stuck in arrested development thanks to his childhood forced to rehearse and perform as the frontman of the Jackson 5 (the incredibly talented Juliano Valdi plays young Michael). As an adult, he is childlike but brilliant, and Logan emphasizes his altruism, couching Michael's desire to be around children as charitable (without addressing the more sinister side of this). A voracious media consumer, we watch as Michael synthesizes James Brown and Charlie Chaplin and Vincent Price and current events with his musical talent to create the most indelible songs of the 20th century.

Fuqua's focus is on the music, with songwriting, video production and choreography scenes, and full-length live performances tackled with staggering precision by Jaafar Jackson, who also sensitively delivers Michael's repressed anguish in confrontational scenes with his father. These are fun to experience in a theater, especially since it has felt so icky to listen to Jackson's music since "Leaving Neverland."

But there's the rub. Because when the credits roll with producer credits for the entire Jackson clan, Michael's kids and his associates, you start to think about the motives. When the estate is involved, a musical biopic is usually about the money: the record sales, charts, streaming, merchandise, etc. The film is an opportunity to celebrate a great – if troubled – artist, but it's also the chance to launder Michael Jackson's catalog, to make it suitable for polite consumption once again. And they do it with one of their own, the Jackson family still a closed circuit, exploiting Michael's talent years after his death.

The music is great. Jaafar Jackson is a star. But the movie itself is uncomfortably problematic in a way that's hard to overlook.

MOVIE REVIEW

# *'Lee Cronin's The Mummy'* is less passion project than embalming by committee

By JOSHUA ROTHKOPF
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

How's Lee Cronin doing? Fine. You know, still making movies. This one's his third feature. Somebody – perhaps it was Lee Cronin himself, probably not – wanted us to know that his latest project, "Lee Cronin's The Mummy," was no mere mummy movie. Certainly not the one you have in mind: bandaged dead guy, ominous hieroglyphics, maybe Brendan Fraser. This is not that mummy movie. This is "Lee Cronin's The Mummy."

As for what that possessive credit means, we're still in a haze. Cronin's previous outing was "Evil Dead Rise," a sequel heavily devoted to the gooey game plan mapped out by Fede Alvarez's 2013 rethink of Sam Raimi's gross-out comedies. In our current moment, when horror seems to be mining an especially rich vein (we've even seen an Oscar go to an unforgettable witch in "Weapons"), Lee Cronin represents the safe old ways of dutiful stewardship, getting the job done for a generic night out.

There are worse sins in the world. And sometimes the best way to introduce an ancient Egyptian curse is via a prologue that's tonally very much like the one in "The Exorcist." Who is the spooky, smiling woman beckoning to a young girl at the edge of her garden? No matter. The kid goes missing and, eight years later, her American family, since relocated to suburban New Mexico, is still feeling the loss: TV reporter Charlie ( Jack Reynor), his haunted wife Larissa ( Laia Costa) and their two semi-surly children, Maud (Billie Roy) and Sebastián (Shylo Molina).

**'Lee Cronin's The Mummy'**

*(In English and Arabic, with subtitles)*

**MPA rating:** R (for strong disturbing violent content, gore, language and brief drug use)

**Running time:** 2:13

**How to watch:** In theaters

When their precious Katie (a game Natalie Grace) is somehow returned to them, though, nearly catatonic with wrinkled, desiccated skin and gnarly toenails that would make a pedi technician shriek, it's hard to blame them for feeling euphoric. Working from his own screenplay, Cronin barrels over the gaping plot holes – a doctor might have some thoughts here – and gets to the good stuff with the family at home in squirm-inducing close quarters, a live-in demon resting in her bedroom.

"Lee Cronin's The Mummy" works best as a variation on Ari Aster's career-making "Hereditary," slicker and less guilt-ridden, with Grace's Katie prone to jaw-snapping clicks and faraway looks, a spin on Milly Shapiro 's hypnotic turn as a doomed host. Eventually, things get more obvious: a levitating wheelchair, some skittering around on the ceiling. If Cronin does have a signature – more of a penchant, really – it's for juicy gore, Katie's skin peeling off in sheets. She goes to town on her own teeth.

Patrick Redmond / Warner Bros. Pictures / TNS

Natalie Grace, rear, and Verónica Falcón in the movie "Lee Cronin's The Mummy."

All these moments are good for audience groans and there's an enjoyable bad movie here for the seizing – that is when Cronin isn't steering the action back to Egypt for an underpowered mystery thread involving a one-dimensional Cairo detective (May Calamawy) pursuing the root of the trouble. Why deploy a plummy archaeology professor (Mark Mitchinson) if you're only going to give him a single scene to cut loose? He's the kind of character who usually makes it to the big finale.

The film is tangled in its mess of references: a possession thriller that also wants to dish out some grainy video footage à la "The Ring" or "Bring Her Back" along with the expected mouth-to-mouth vomiting. Ironically, an honest-to-goodness mummy movie consumed with exotica (the first one from 1932 was released in the wake of the global mania over King Tut's tomb) makes a lot of sense right now, with America straying into foreign deserts.

Was that in mind at any point? You'd have to ask Lee Cronin. It's his movie and these are his mummy issues.

Kevin Winter / Getty Images / TNS

Steve Stevens, left, and Billy Idol perform live onstage at Light Up the Blues 7 Concert Celebrating Autism Speaks' 20th Anniversary at The Greek Theatre on April 26, 2025, in Los Angeles.

# Nobody's figured out how to stop Billy Idol

Rebecca Sapp / Getty Images for The Recording Academy / TNS

Billy Idol attends An Evening With Billy Idol & Steve Stevens at Grammy Museum L.A. Live on Oct. 9, 2025, in Los Angeles.

**By MIKAEL WOOD**
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

LOS ANGELES — In the space of six days last week, Billy Idol sang his classic "Rebel Yell" with Carrie Underwood on TV's "American Idol," popped out for a surprise performance of "Eyes Without a Face" with Sombr at the Coachella festival and was named a member of the Class of 2026 set to be inducted later this year into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

"Keeping busy," the singer said – blond hair still spiky, upper lip temporarily unsnarled – at his home in the Hollywood Hills during a break from all the action.

Idol, 70, emerged as part of London's seething mid-'70s punk scene; after his stint fronting Generation X, he went solo and became one of the biggest rock acts of the MTV era with hits like "White Wedding" and "Dancing With Myself." Somehow, he's never quite gone out of style since then: He played the Kia Forum and Madison Square Garden just last year, while "Eyes Without a Face," the dreamy-sinister ballad that became Idol's first Top 10 pop hit in 1984, has taken up a seemingly permanent place on TikTok and Instagram.

"Billy is such a legend," says 20-year-old Sombr, who calls "Eyes" one of his all-time favorite songs. "He's managed to blur the lines between rock and pop in such a timeless way. His songs are a huge inspiration to me."

Idol tells his story – including the details of a debilitating drug addiction – in a new documentary, "Billy Idol Should Be Dead"; this summer he'll take his songs back on the road for a tour scheduled to stop for a week at the Fontainebleau in Las Vegas.

With some questions to ask about his endurance, I sat down with the singer and his longtime guitarist and co-songwriter, Steve Stevens, in Idol's dimly lighted living room, where books and VHS tapes lined one wall and a humidifier hummed quietly in the background. We ended up talking about shirtlessness, Geese and Idol's complicated relationship with John Lydon (aka Johnny Rotten), whose old Sex Pistols bandmates Steve Jones and Paul Cook team up now and then with Idol in a group called – what else? – Generation Sex.

**Q:** Why do you reckon "Eyes Without a Face" is having a moment?

**STEVE STEVENS:** The lyrics, the melody, a bit of crazy guitar – it's got everything a great Billy Idol song should have.

**Q:** Did doing a ballad at that time feel like a risk?

**BILLY IDOL:** Until we got the guitar break, yeah. Then you had both sides: the croon and the explosion. With Keith Forsey's production, as well, we avoided some traps – very obvious sound effects that got other bands trapped in an '80s world.

**STEVENS:** Billy was listening to a lot of reggae. I remember you saying the bass had to be like a Lee "Scatch" Perry thing. All of these bass players would come in and it would be "Next!" until we found –

**IDOL:** Sal Cuevas. He was playing for the "Dreamgirls" show, and finally somebody got it right.

**Q:** What inspired the image in the title?

**IDOL:** I was just trying not to write an obvious love song. It's the opposite of what a lot of other '80s songs were like. Instead of "True Colors," it was: This is the end of the world – and it's getting worse.

**Q:** You talk in the documentary about how the big idea at the outset of your solo career was fusing rock and dance music.

**IDOL:** Rock 'n' roll was always dance music – music to f--- to, really. That's what rock 'n' roll meant – it was a euphemism for sex. I was in love with someone, Perri Lister, and I was having a lot of sex that was opening my mind beyond just being a teenager.

**Q:** Steve, how did you think about guitars fitting into a dance groove?

**STEVENS:** It was a great opportunity to do something new. By the time Billy and I met, it was the era of the California shredders – Eddie Van Halen and then a lot of bad Eddie Van Halen copies. But I never was one of those guitar players who lived for the solo. With Billy, if you're gonna have a guitar solo, have a reason to do it.

**Q:** John Sykes from the Rock Hall says in the doc, Billy, that you always understood the importance of the visual. Why did you?

**IDOL:** Growing up, watching the Beatles and the Stones and Bowie later on, we learned from what they were doing. "A Hard Day's Night," they're running and jumping and going crazy in a field – it showed that you don't just have to be standing there playing your instruments. In my case, I had a book about horror films, and it had the Boris Karloff one where he's a priest or something – he's got a black altar with white crosses. And I just thought: I'm gonna take that for "White Wedding."

**Q:** Did you feel comfortable in the role of a sex symbol in those early MTV days?

**IDOL:** I was doing it a bit deliberately – the shirt off, showing my body, then later really working out and making it look great once I got beyond the drugs. I was trying to put a sexy element into punk because that's one thing that was missing from it. In England, Johnny Rotten was saying that sex is just a bunch of squelching noises – a kind of revulsion. But I was having a sexual time, and I wanted to project that.

**Q:** Steve, did being looked at come naturally to you?

**STEVENS:** I mean, you can't stand next to Billy Idol onstage in a flannel shirt.

**Q:** Who do you see as a younger musician carrying on what you guys do? Yungblud comes to mind.

**IDOL:** He always reminds me a little bit of me. Moves about more than I did – one day he'll realize he can stand occasionally.

**Q:** I can't recall ever seeing him wear a shirt.

**IDOL:** He's doing the no-shirt the whole night. I used to take it off for "Rebel Yell."

**Q:** You can take the success of a Yungblud or a Sombr as a sign that rock is thriving in 2026.

**IDOL:** I saw that band Geese the other day – they're not playing to the lowest common denominator at all. They're doing their own thing, as if they don't care what the audience wants, and the audience is super connecting. They're singing all the words – I couldn't even hear half the words.

**Q:** What motivated you to go see Geese?

**IDOL:** I'd been hearing about them but hadn't seen them. Then we were in Paris for an Ann Demeulemeester show – I was gonna walk in it – and they were playing. Their success is a good sign because it shows that you don't have to be up there just trying to copy what's on the charts.

**Q:** In the doc you talk about how Generation X was born out of a sense that young people had no future in the U.K.

**IDOL:** We were being told that – that's why Johnny sang it [in the Sex Pistols' "God Save the Queen"].

**Q:** Young people in America now describe a similar feeling here.

**IDOL:** I think Americans are suffering in the same way the British were suffering in the '70s and '80s. People are realizing that the [financial] crash that happened in 2008, maybe that was the end of the American empire. Also: Discourse is gone, and people are just entrenched – they're looking for something and not exactly finding it. It could be why rock 'n' roll is coming back.

**Q:** You in touch with John Lydon at all these days?

**IDOL:** We played a festival together in England last year, so I saw him – I didn't talk to him but I did go and watch Public Image. I know he didn't think it was right when I did the Generation Sex thing because he didn't like the idea of me singing Sex Pistols songs. But I was just trying to find a way for Jonesy and Cookie to play – we weren't thinking about trying to usurp Johnny or anything like that. Jonesy and Cookie wanted to go and play to the fans, and now they're having a great time [touring] with Frank Carter. That could be Johnny – it should be Johnny. But he doesn't want to do it.

**Q:** Old grievances either recede or get stronger with age.

**IDOL:** Look at Pink Floyd: David Gilmour and Roger Waters can't stand being in the same room, let alone make music. A lot of things are going on like that, where you see old bands sue each other or whatever. It's a shame when they were so together at one point.

**Q:** What could push one of you to sue the other?

**STEVENS:** We're not that kind of people. And we don't have that kind of people around us either.

**Q:** At the height of Billy's addiction, Steve, did you ever resent him for endangering your career?

**STEVENS:** I was as guilty as he was – I was no angel.

**Q:** Last thing: Do you think the Rock Hall has properly recognized punk?

**IDOL:** They did the MC5 year before last. And Iggy [Pop] is in. But the New York Dolls still aren't, and there's a lot of other punk rock groups that haven't been thought about at all.

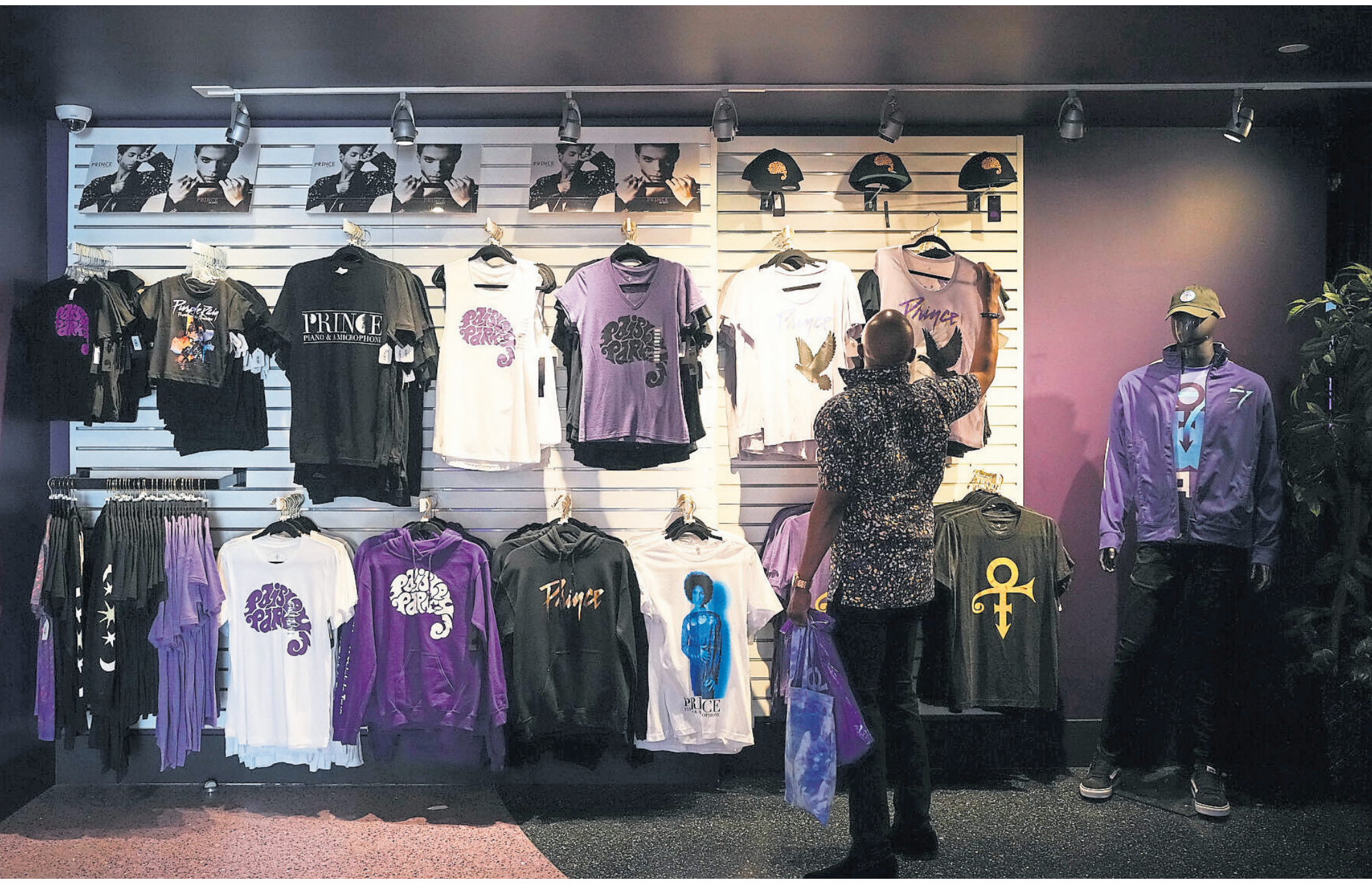
**Q:** The Sex Pistols famously didn't show up for their induction.

**IDOL:** Axl [Rose] too. I heard a lot of negative things about the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, but when we were there for the Ozzy [Osbourne] induction [in 2024], I didn't feel that at all. Running into everybody backstage, it was a really fun night. We even hung out with Kool & the Gang – Kool was getting loaded, and he's like 80 years old.

**STEVENS:** I think where the hall is currently is very different from its initial inception. You get a lot of people saying, "Well, they're not rock 'n' roll" – inducting Salt-N-Pepa, for example. But I think that's a good thing.

**Q:** Someone described it to me by saying the nominating committee went from the Rolling Stone crew to the MTV crew. Did you feel embraced by that older Rolling Stone establishment?

**IDOL:** Well, they did put me on the cover. I just think people were so invested in the '60s and '70s that they couldn't believe anything good was gonna happen in the '80s.



Shari L. Gross / Minneapolis Star Tribune / TNS

Plenty of Prince-themed merchandise is available in the Paisley Park store during Celebration in Chanhassen, Minnesota, on June 8, 2023.

# We want more from Prince's vault

## Here's why we can't have it

**By JON BREAM**
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

MINNEAPOLIS — Prince deserves better.

He was the complete rock star, rivaling Bob Dylan as the greatest music maker to come out of Minnesota. He became an international sensation with an unparalleled reputation as a concert performer.

A decade after his death, not enough of Prince's legacy has emerged. A vast vault of unheard material remains unreleased. Little is being done to introduce him to a new generation of music lovers.

What has his estate done for Prince lately?

Prince's fans are disappointed and frustrated because his visibility is not growing to match his lofty stature.

"I do feel for Prince fans that his legacy has not been looked after," said Matthew Jeffery of London, who this month published a 10,000-word open letter to the Prince estate on Substack.

A much-anticipated, authorized nine-hour Netflix documentary by an Oscar-winning filmmaker was shelved in late 2024 after nearly five years in the making because the Prince estate objected to its tone and focus.

A highly touted, $26.5 million "Purple Rain" musical staged by a Tony-winning team based on Prince's hit 1984 movie had a splashy opening in Minneapolis in fall 2025. But it doesn't seem likely to reach its stated goal of Broadway in the immediate future.

No significant new material has been issued from Prince's vaunted vault of unreleased recordings and concert videos since 2023's "Diamonds and Pearls Super Deluxe" boxed set.

"You should understand that we just took over this estate 3½ years ago, and I would say [it's been] less than a year and a half being able to be free of the restrictions that Netflix had," said Londell McMillan of Prince Legacy LLC, co-manager of the estate. "Rome wasn't built in three years."

Netflix had exclusive access to material in Prince's vault for its documentary, an arrangement negotiated by a previous estate administrator.

And not all Prince fans are down on the current estate.

"The estate's heart is in the right place in terms of protecting his legacy, whether they are popular or not. Their intent is where it should be," said Donny English, a Washington, D.C., lawyer who saw Prince in concert about 100 times over 35 years.

"Their vision for the future of preserving his legacy and releasing music seems to be a good one. The problem is the execution has been bad," English said. "You can't be both the visionary and the person to execute the plan."

Follow through – or at least communicating what's happening – is a significant issue.

For instance, in June 2025 at the annual Prince Celebration gathering of fans in the Twin Cities, McMillan and business partner Charles Spicer Jr. touted some upcoming major Prince projects – specifically a jukebox musical film helmed by Oscar winner Ryan Coogler as well as the estate's own documentary, now that Netflix is out of the picture.

McMillan told the Minnesota Star Tribune this month that the Coogler film and in-house documentary are in development, and the musical is undergoing "edits" with a possible opening on Broadway in 2027 or 2028.

Plans for Prince Celebration 2026 in June were scheduled to be announced on March 25 but weren't shared until April 14 with Chaka Khan, Morris Day and Miguel among the performers along with appearances by Bootsy Collins and Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis.

There is apparently no staff at Paisley Park, Prince's studio complex turned museum in Chanhassen, empowered to make decisions. Directions seem to come from McMillan, a New York entertainment lawyer, manager and publisher who has other obligations besides co-managing the Prince estate.

McMillan, who has become the face and de facto spokesman for all things Prince these days, acknowledged, "there is a role that we can play better in communicating and embracing fan input."

Lack of activities and lack of communication have turned off Stacy Morgan, a regular at Paisley Park since she moved to Minneapolis from New York in 2020 because she's a Prince fan.

"I haven't been motivated," said Morgan, who appreciates "Prince Night" at the Twins and Timberwolves games. "I love going to Paisley Park even if it's parts I've seen a million times. But right now, what's even happening out there?"

### Untangling the estate

After years of Prince's six heirs fighting in probate court, the management of the estate changed in 2021. That's when Prince's three eldest surviving siblings transferred their half of the estate to McMillan's Prince Legacy LLC, and the other surviving siblings sold their interests to Primary Wave Music, a New York management and publishing firm that has worked with the estates of Whitney Houston and Bob Marley.

For the first three years after Prince died, Paisley Park was run by Graceland Holdings LLC. That organization did a commendable job establishing it as a museum and staging Celebration, a multiday fan convention with live performances, panel discussions and listening/viewing parties of material from the vault.

Following the expiration of Graceland's contract, Paisley Park was operated by an executive staff, hired by a court-appointed administrator. That group notably organized 2021's striking display "The Beautiful Collection" of 300 pairs of Prince's bespoke shoes, the best exhibit and thing to happen at Paisley Park since it opened as a museum.

McMillan, who has overseen Paisley for four years, seems as concerned with protecting Prince's legacy as promoting it. For example, he recently sought to stop Apollonia, Prince's co-star in the 1984 film "Purple Rain," from trademarking her stage name because McMillan felt that Prince, who coined the moniker, had proprietary interest for marketing "Apollonia" in the "Purple Rain" musical. Last week, Rolling Stone reported that Apollonia and McMillan had reached a confidential out-of-court settlement.

McMillan scotched plans for Prince's star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, set to be unveiled on April 21.

"We had plans to do that. I thought it would be great for his legacy to continue," Mayte Garcia, Prince's first ex-wife, told the Star Tribune. "Legalities. I don't have any comment on it. Unfortunately, the powers that be have plans for another time."

McMillan explained that Prince twice declined the Walk of Fame star offer when he was alive because he "didn't want his name in the ground." McMillan recently proposed that Prince be honored on a wall instead, as Muhammad Ali is on the Walk of Fame, but the Hollywood honchos nixed that.

While the estate has released some impressively curated reissues of Prince's albums and material from the vault (see related story), it has done so at a noticeably slower pace than, say, the catalogs of Bob Dylan, David Bowie, Bruce Springsteen or Neil Young.

Even though the late Michael Jackson didn't leave behind many unreleased recordings, his legacy has been buoyed by a new biopic opening April 24, two Cirque du Soleil shows that began in the 2010s and the 2021 Broadway hit "MJ the Musical" that has subsequently toured the world.

Pulling together a project from Prince's treasure trove is not as simple as it might seem, McMillan said. Decisions are made jointly by his Prince Legacy LLC and co-managers Primary Wave, a privately held company that answers to shareholders. The co-managers have to deal with various assets partners such as Warner Bros. and Sony record labels and Universal Music Publishing, not to mention technology, including digitizing the materials in the vault.

In short, it's more complicated than fans realize to secure agreements and produce new projects.

That said, McMillan mentioned that reissues of a deluxe version of Prince's "Parade" (1986) and "Musicology" (2004) are in the works.

### Reaching Gen Z

Unauthorized things happen outside the Prince estate that promote his legacy, including college classes, photo books and tribute bands like the Minneapolis-based Chase & Ovation.

"Anything that puts Prince in front of people is important," said Baltimore photographer Steve Parke, who this month will publish his second book, "Prince: Black, White, Color," after spending 13 years on the icon's staff.

"I always get people being surprised by the photos of him in the [Minnesota Landscape] Arboretum with all the fall leaves around him. That particular set of photos becomes a meme all over social media in the fall."

Arguably the best thing that has happened to Prince's legacy of late is two of his songs, "Purple Rain" and "When Doves Cry," were featured in the finale of Netflix's "Stranger Things" in December.

That exposure helped introduce Prince to a younger audience, sparking boosts of 577 percent and 128 percent in streams on Spotify for those two songs, respectively, among Gen Z listeners.

"He's had a resurgence with my generation," said Sophia Arndt, 21, a University of Minnesota senior from Stillwater who is arts & entertainment editor of the Minnesota Daily. "After the finale of 'Stranger Things,' you couldn't go anywhere on social media without hearing that opening guitar [riff] to 'Purple Rain.' I've seen that impact especially on my friends who weren't raised in Minnesota."

People discover Prince for the first time in different ways.

Morgan, a Minneapolis bank manager, took a group of 30 non-Prince fans from her office on a tour of Paisley Park three years ago.

"It's one thing to hear about Prince but it's another thing to be at Paisley," she said. "They still talk about it to this day. It's a group that wants to go back."

### What fans want

Longtime fans are speaking up because they would like to see the estate do more to promote Prince.

"Many fans, creators and cultural observers feel a growing unease, not because Prince's work has lost power but because the structures guiding his legacy still do not reflect the scale, imagination, or ambition he embodied in life," wrote Jeffery, the British fan who posted a thoughtful, thorough open letter.

"This is not said lightly and it is not said with hostility. It is disappointment born of belief and a sense that something extraordinary is being handled without enough visible direction."

A Prince fan of more than 40 years in Hungary has started a petition asking the Prince estate to create a panel of fans – a trust of sorts – to advise them on how to proceed. Kares Balogh reports that his petition has more than 200 signatures.

He would like to see the estate publish a full catalog of Prince's work in a book and then announce a series of releases from the vault as well as an education program.

"The press attention around the book would help keep Prince's name in the news and support sales of his actual work instead of the exploitative memorabilia currently on offer," Balogh wrote.

McMillan counters that he appreciates the enthusiasm of the fans, calling them "well-intentioned and ill-informed."

Other Prince aficionados have specific things on their Purple wish lists.

"Demos might be at the top of my list," said University of Minnesota professor Elliott Powell, who has taught a class on Prince for 10 years. "I want to get a glimpse into the creative process of Prince even if it's not finished demos or if it's things he's working through."

Powell, English and Morgan pine for the release of concert films – specifically Aug. 3, 1983 (when "Purple Rain" songs were introduced) and June 7, 1984, (Prince's birthday) both at First Avenue, and Jan. 21, 2016 (first Piano & a Microphone shows) at Paisley Park. Fans also want to see "The Second Coming," an unedited movie Prince filmed in 1982 during the Controversy Tour.

"There are so many amazing concerts that should come out," said ex-wife Garcia. "He was always filming. He was such a creative person. We wrote a children's book called 'Happy Tears,' which is really, really beautiful. I'd love to release that."

McMillan acknowledges that his team is understaffed. In January, the estate hired a new cohort of archivists and engineers to catalog and digitize the remaining 55 percent of the vault that's undocumented.

Superfan English, 54, has spent more than $75,000 on Prince (merchandise, events and four annual tours of Paisley Park plus travel) in the past decade, but he frets that none of his seven kids, ages 13 to 33, had a desire to watch "Purple Rain" with him.

English is concerned that Prince's core audience – people in their 50s and 60s – will be dying with no new generations of fans to succeed them. He thinks the next 10 to 20 years are crucial to cementing Prince's legacy.

"Unless we do a better job of preserving that legacy so it does continue to grow, so he isn't forgotten 100 years from now …," English said as his voice trailed off. "He should be as much a part of history as Socrates or Plato or some of these people we read about centuries later."

# BOOKS

## Why Louise Erdrich says her book 'Python's Kiss' took two decades to finish

By ERIK PEDERSEN
The Orange County Register (TNS)

Louise Erdrich was getting help with her computer when her daughter discovered something on the hard drive.

A short story.

"'Love of My Days' was a forgotten file in my computer, and when I found it again, I was shocked," Erdrich recalls, crediting her daughter for unearthing the piece about a man who returns to his prairie farm to find someone else there, claiming the place is his. "I know I wrote this; I remember that I wrote it… I just forgot the file."

That story appears with 12 others in "Python's Kiss," a collection by the National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize-winning author, in stores now. Representing two decades of work, the book's stories range from literary fiction to sci-fi with effortlessly engaging storytelling, whether about a bus full of children in a blizzard or a daughter seeking revenge on her late father in a corporately controlled afterlife.

Ann Patchett, the bestselling author of "Bel Canto," "Tom Lake" and the upcoming "Whistler," praised "Python's Kiss" during an interview recently. "How good is that book?" said Patchett. "My heart just soars."

Erdrich, who owns Birchbark Books & Native Arts in Minneapolis, was asked about the recent deployment of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, into the city, which sent thousands of masked agents onto its streets, sparked protests by citizens and local officials, and led to the shooting deaths of Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti by ICE agents.

Calling ICE's actions "murderous and grotesque," Erdrich directed the conversation toward the good works her neighbors and community have done throughout.

"I think it's hard for other cities to imagine how small and closely knit Minneapolis and St. Paul really are," says Erdrich, praising the work of local businesses and bookstores, such as The Smitten Kitten, Moon Palace Books and Dreamhaven Books. "We're engaging in a huge amount of mutual aid in support of people who still can't come out of their houses and kids who still can't go to school. … It's good that we have so many good people here.

"But it shouldn't be this way. It's just wrong."

Warm, thoughtful, and funny throughout a nearly 90-minute conversation, Erdrich, an enrolled citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians of North Dakota, discussed her work, family, and the challenges of writing when her black chihuahua-terrier mix Yogi wants her to play.

"He loves for me to pretend to grab his toy gorilla, so he can run away and feel as though he's a wolf bringing his kill to the den," she says. "He does this many times a day."

"I'll be trying to write something, and he'll be looking at me with his toy gorilla like, 'I dare you,'" she laughs. "This has been my life. I'm always veering from one outlandish scene in some fictional world to pretending to steal a toy gorilla."

The following conversation was edited for length and clarity.

**Q:** You worked with your daughter on this book; she provided the artwork.

**A:** I have had the joy of working with my daughter for many years on the covers of the books. So I have the luck of really loving to look at my books and sign them, because my daughter designed these covers that reflect both of our ideas about it. I'm not an artist. I couldn't do what she does, but we talk things through – and then she does whatever she wants. [laughs] Isn't that how it always is? You talk things through, and then your young person does whatever they want to do.

She lives nearby, and I get to work with her. I have another daughter who's a manager at the bookstore. And each of my four daughters has something to do with something that's going on in the family. It's really so satisfying.

**Q:** These stories were written over the past two decades. Were they always intended to be stories, or did they begin as possible novels and change over time?

**A:** They start out their own way. Some of them have been stories that I started 25 years ago. For instance, 'The Stone' I started 25 years ago or so, and maybe wrote a page and then thought, 'What am I writing? This is interesting,' but then I just stopped writing it because I didn't have any other ideas about where it was going. So I left it for years and then came back to it.

That's true of several of the stories. And then a couple of them I wrote very quickly.

"Wedding Dresses" was actually based on a true moment where my pipes froze and water poured down, but then I invented this whole destruction and everything that would have happened. When I turned the book in, my editor at Harper Collins said, That story isn't working, and I thought, Oh well, OK. I revised it and wrote the whole thing in a week. But it had a long, long preface of frustration.

**Q:** Is there a throughline to the stories in "Python's Kiss?"

**A:** The gist of some of these stories is contained in the title of the book," Python's Kiss," the getting of wisdom, the realization we have at some point in our lives that the things we didn't notice become extremely important in retrospect – and even affect the outcome of what you're doing in the present.

HarperCollins / TNS

I'm glad I waited to finish this book around now, because I think I wouldn't know some of these things.

**Q:** "The Hollow Children" is a great story that is, in part, about a part-time schoolbus driver ferrying a group of children through a white-out blizzard. Can you talk about writing that?

**A:** Oh, thank you. I like reading very old newspapers, and there was one line about a blizzard. And of course, I've been in blizzards all through my life. It's a recurring theme. And in the book I'm writing now, there's a blizzard. It was always a blizzard, or once in a while, a tornado or something. The weather is just so wide open in the North; I go back and forth to North Dakota all the time.

And so there was one line that said a bus driver had picked up the children on his route and driven all day just trying to find the schoolhouse. I don't think it even says they found the schoolhouse, but they might have found a farm or something else. I know the place where it could have happened. I know all of the roads, everything around the Red River Valley. So I just imagined the extraordinary level of fear that a person with a bus full of children would have.

I've had children in a car when I got caught in a blizzard, and I've been terrified trying to find the road. So that comes out of experience. You have to open your senses during that kind of experience when you're in a car and you're driving blind.

One time, when I was doing it, I felt the shadow of a line of train cars on a road that I've driven many times – and just the shadow allowed me to get safely across this 20-25 mile space because I remembered it so well.

My God, I was happy when I was out of it. I have lots of weather apps on my phone now.

**Q:** "Borsalino" is a powerful story set in Venice, Italy, and it seems to reference elements similar to your life. Is that something you'd be comfortable talking about?

**A:** Well, I do have a hat. [laughs]

You know, it's hard to talk about things in my life. For instance, the suicide of my husband in 1997, but I was able to talk about this through visits I've taken to Venice, with or without other people or family, and all the things that have happened.

I don't know what I can really say about that, except that obviously I've lived the end of it. The other thing is that I'm not a memoir writer, so I have no idea how sometimes things will come out in fiction. … Sometimes I write things that are memoir-like, but it's easier to write fiction for me. It makes more sense.

**Q:** We talked a lot about our dogs earlier; you also have dogs in your stories.

**A:** The dogs in "Python's Kiss" are all based on dogs that I know, an array of dogs and dog behaviors. I can't remember how many dogs there are in these stories; I didn't bother to count. And snakes. there's a lot of snakes.

**Q:** Yes, in the title story, there's an unexpected moment involving a snake. I can't imagine another author writing it in just that way.

**A:** Writing stories is so pleasurable because it feels as though, if I can keep returning to one, they eventually fit together. It's harder to write a novel because it has to take place over a longer stretch. The middles of novels are very hard to write, but the middles of stories are where everything changes.

There's always a place in the story where it's like touching a magic spring in a lockbox, and all of sudden, you have the rest of the story. It shows you what's going to happen.

And it always does that. If it doesn't, then, of course, I don't keep going with the story. But usually, when I keep writing pieces of the story, I get to that hidden button.

**Q:** In one of the stories, there's also a pretty charming character who might be a ghost.

**A:** It feels very real to me. I think all the ghosts that show up in my work are real people.

**Q:** It's rare to speak with someone who has won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, and I wonder if it ever just pops into your head while you're taking a walk or playing with your dog that your work has been recognized in this way.

**A:** Well, it means a lot to me. But at the same time, I can't really let it interfere with me playing with my dog. [laughs]

## BESTSELLERS

*Here are the bestsellers for the week that ended Saturday, April 11, compiled from data from independent and chain bookstores, book wholesalers and independent distributors nationwide, powered by Circana BookScan.*

### Hardcover fiction

1. Rites of the Starling. Devney Perry. Red Tower
2. Revenge Prey. John Sandford. Putnam
3. Yesteryear. Caro Claire Burke. Knopf
4. The Correspondent. Virginia Evans. Crown
5. Starside (deluxe ed.). Alex Aster. Avon
6. Bloodsinger. Juliette Cross. Bramble
7. Judge Stone. Davis/Patterson. Little, Brown
8. The Night We Met (deluxe ed.). Abby Jimenez. Forever
9. The Ending Writes Itself. Evelyn Clarke. Harper
10. Into the Blue. Emma Brodie. Ballantine

### Hardcover nonfiction

1. The New Perimenopause. Mary Claire Haver. Rodale
2. Joyful, Anyway. Kate Bowler. Dial
3. London Falling. Patrick Radden Keefe. Doubleday
4. Strangers. Belle Burden. Dial
5. King Arthur Baking Company's Book of Pizza. King Arthur Baking. Simon Element
6. Keep It Simple Y'all. Matthew Bounds. Clarkson Potter
7. Planet Money. Alex Mayyasi. Norton
8. The Anatomy of Awakening. Sue Morter. Hay House
9. Burn the Haystack. Jennie Young. Morrow
10. In a World of Sunrises. Cleo Wade. Avid Reader

### Trade paperback

1. Theo of Golden. Allen Levi. Atria
2. Game On. Navessa Allen. Slowburn
3. 18 Days in Heaven. Gabe Poirot. Harrison House
4. The Jesus Discoveries. Jeremiah J. Johnston. Bethany House
5. Twisted Pawn. L.J. Shen. Bloom
6. Dungeon Crawler Carl. Matt Dinniman. Ace
7. Remarkably Bright Creatures. Shelby Van Pelt. Ecco
8. Dear Debbie. Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen
9. Want to Know a Secret? Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen
10. Project Hail Mary (media tie-in). Andy Weir. Ballantine

*Reprinted from Publishers Weekly.*

REVIEW

## Two comic novels from 'Arrested Development' writers

By CHRIS HEWITT
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

This month, if you read just one former "Arrested Development" writer's comic novel about a woman who used to write for TV but has shifted gears, make it "Go Gentle."

Weirdly, two novels that fit that description are out in the span of a week: "Go Gentle" is by Maria Semple, whose " Where'd You Go, Bernadette " was a blockbuster and book club favorite in 2012. "Like This, But Funnier" is a debut novel by Hallie Cantor. In both new books, lingering trauma from the authors' time in TV (although not specifically "Arrested Development") informs the story.

Cantor's book is about Caroline, who fights both misogyny and Hollywood bureaucracy as she attempts to pitch her own idea for a TV series and to turn a terrible book into a series she'd be willing to put her name on. Cantor is a funny and sometimes insightful writer. (Caroline, who's ambivalent about having a baby with her long-suffering husband, observes of parenting, "The only way forward was to uphold the lie that it was the greatest thing ever and hope more people fell for it so you weren't alone, and then pressure your kids to have kids so you could be a grandparent. Parenting was the ultimate pyramid scheme.")

Unfortunately, Cantor overestimates how much we'll care about the minutiae of TV production – which is explored in exhaustive detail – and overcommits to an extended metaphor about Caroline's bathroom difficulties. In both cases, less would be so much more.

"Go Gentle" is weirder and more ambitious than Semple's previous books (she also wrote "Today Will Be Different"). You need to buckle in and surrender to the farcical tale of Adora, who wrote for TV until she was sexually abused and used a settlement to become a, believe it or not, philosopher. She and her daughter now live in New York, where she leads a "coven" of single women/neighbors, teaches Stoicism to a wealthy family, dips her toe into a romance with a shadowy guy who might be a spy and becomes embroiled in both an art-world conspiracy and a global arms deal.

**LEFT:** Simon & Schuster and **RIGHT:** Putnam / TNS

It's a lot and it's often difficult to keep track of what's going on but I didn't mind because Semple has such an agile brain. Like "Arrested Development," "Go Gentle" is packed with jokes ("Layla was a young, natural beauty who was nevertheless doing more than her part to keep thriving the injectable economy") but the element of the novel that works surprisingly well is – wait for it – the philosophy.

Adora's lessons are an oddly entertaining intro to real-world applications of lessons from Descartes and Sophocles. Turns out those old dudes are surprisingly relatable (much more so than, for instance, how a writing room on a TV show is organized in "Like This"), especially when they're juxtaposed with jokes about Taylor Swift and "Emily in Paris."

"Go Gentle" is not what anyone would call a disciplined book. There's a sense that it is racing almost as fast as Semple's mind and that she occasionally forgets that we're not in there with her, which is why a couple of the supporting characters are hard to keep track of. And the subplots do pile up. But, as Semple tells us that Seneca said, "Nothing is heavy if you take it lightly."

There's more heavy stuff than you'd expect in "Go Gentle," but Semple frappes it all together into a wild ride of a book that's delightful while you're reading it and that lingers long after you're done.

# AUTOMOTIVE

## Used EV sales charge up on high gas prices, even as new EV demand declines

**By CAROLINE PETROW-COHEN**
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Eric Thayer / Los Angeles Times / TNS

**An electric vehicle charging station on April 8 in Long Beach, California.**

As gas prices soared in California last month, Irvine resident Marc Tan realized his Mercedes SUV was getting too expensive to refuel.

He decided to save money at the pump and purchased a used Tesla last month.

"I had to trade in my SUV, " said Tan, who works as a nurse. "It was just too expensive."

Tan has bought two electric vehicles this year to avoid relying on gas while driving his kids to school and activities.

As the war in Iran squeezes the global oil supply, fuel prices have increased sharply across the U.S. Average prices in California climbed to nearly $6 per gallon, according to AAA, while national prices were slightly above $4. Gas prices in California have risen 30 percent since the start of the year, according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

The trend has driven renewed interest in electric vehicles, and those looking to save money on gas are also trying to save money on their cars by buying pre-owned vehicles.

New EV sales are still declining following blows to the industry from the Trump administration, but used EVs are bucking that trend because they look more affordable now relative to new cars and used gas-powered cars.

Used EV sales increased more than 20 percent year over year in the first quarter of 2026, according to data from Cox Automotive.

Used electric vehicles now cost around the same as used traditional cars and often offer better value, experts said.

"The high gas prices are getting people to look at what their options are, and the wheels are starting to spin," said Jessica Caldwell, an auto analyst at Edmunds. "You can get a pretty nice used EV for under $25,000, which is not easy to do on the market at large," including electric and gas cars.

Electric vehicles depreciate in value faster than traditional cars, meaning buyers can get a good deal on a used EV that hasn't been on the road for long.

Used EVs are typically less than four years old and equipped with modern technology such as driver assistance, heated seats and Apple CarPlay. A wave of them is hitting the market as they come off lease from 2023, a year of heightened EV enthusiasm and new models.

While former President Biden was in office in 2023, the federal government heavily incentivized the transition to electric vehicles.

"It's not surprising that the used EV market is starting to accelerate, because it was about three or four years ago that the new one started accelerating," said Mark Schirmer, director of industry insights at Cox Automotive. "We're starting to get a better variety, better choice and better price points."

Used EVs also tend to have lower mileage than their gas counterparts and therefore better value, Schirmer said, because EV drivers don't use them for long road trips to avoid having to stop and charge.

Used electric vehicle sales increased 25 percent in the first quarter this year, according to Cox. New electric vehicle sales were down 26% in February from a year earlier.

The EV industry has faced setbacks recently as the Trump administration pares back EV incentives and dealership requirements, including eliminating a California ban on new gas-powered car sales by 2035.

In response, major automakers such as Ford, Hyundai and Stellantis have cut their EV offerings.

EV sales crashed following the September expiration of a $7,500 tax credit for new EVs and a $4,000 credit for used ones.

"There's no premium you have to pay for an EV in the used market," said iSeeCars.com analyst Karl Brauer. "Value is huge for used buyers, and when gas prices are going up, that becomes a focus."

On social media, car shoppers and recent EV buyers are sharing their reasons for making the switch to electric.

"Not having to deal with the ups and downs of gas prices is one of the benefits of owning an EV," one Reddit user wrote last month.

Another Reddit user said it cost them $1.59 total to charge their Ford Mustang Mach-E for six hours, reaching a battery level of 90 percent.

In California, the appeal of a new or used EV is twofold – gas prices are especially high, and charging infrastructure is more developed than in many other states. Although electricity rates are increasing in the state, many residents are turning to solar power to source their own energy for their cars and homes.

Data show that more people are shopping for EVs even if they haven't made purchases yet.

Cars.com saw a 25 percent increase in searches for used EVs from the end of February to the end of March, and a 23 percent increase in searches for new EVs.

"I don't see how else you can get a vehicle that's as new, as reliable, as safe and as affordable as used electric vehicle," auto analyst Brian Moody said. "Add to that the current gas prices, and it's a no-brainer."

Tesla's were the most commonly searched for vehicle among used EVs on the site, according to Cars.com data.

Tesla sales have stumbled over the past year, hurt by industry challenges and reputation damage after Elon Musk involved himself in politics. Many alienated Tesla owners sold their vehicles in protest, leading to an influx of them on the used market, and therefore lower prices.

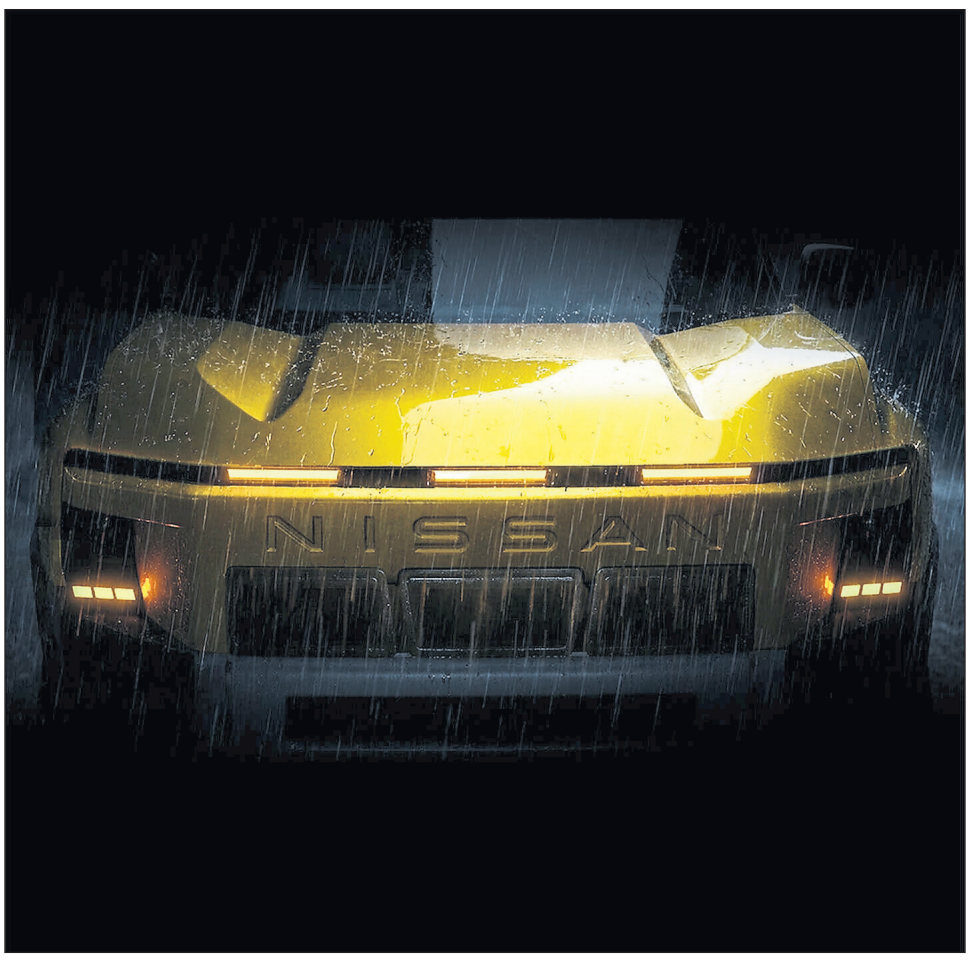
Tesla was dethroned early this year by Chinese automaker BYD as the largest EV seller in the world, but for many Californians, Musk's signature vehicles are still an obvious choice. They come with an extensive super charging network and widespread service centers. They also offer "Full Self-Drive" mode, which appeals to many shoppers despite coming under regulatory scrutiny.

Tan, who bought two Teslas this year as gas prices have shot up, said he's satisfied with his purchases.

"To me, Teslas are the most safe and reliable," Tan said. "Gas has been absolutely too expensive."

## How Nissan plans U.S. comeback with Bronco-fighting Xterra SUV

**By HENRY PAYNE**
The Detroit News (TNS)




Nissan / TNS

**The all-new Xterra will join Nissan's future lineup as a U.S.-produced, body-on-frame SUV.**

It's been a rough decade for Nissan Motor Corp. as sales plummeted 40 percent in the United States, CEO Carlos Ghosn was arrested in Japan, and the brand's planned EV transformation, beginning with the Ariya SUV, flopped.

So for the 2027 model year, Nissan is going back to basics – beginning with the return of the dirt-chewing, Mississippi-assembled, V6-powered, truck-based Xterra SUV aimed squarely at the Jeep Wrangler and Ford Bronco.

Just three weeks after Hyundai stunned attendees at New York Auto Show media week with the midsized, truck-based Boulder Concept, Nissan announced the Xterra. Based on its midsized Frontier pickup truck, the Xterra was previously produced from 1999-2015. The new model joins an Asian assault on the popular, profit-rich off-road segment as General Motors Co.'s Chevy and GMC brands have focused on new electric vehicles.

The midsize off-road segment – a cash cow for U.S. automakers – has exploded in popularity over the last 10 years, including by 107,000 units in Q4 of 2025 alone. Rushing into the Chevrolet/GMC void, Toyota has added the Tacoma-truck-based Land Cruiser and Lexus GX models to complement its rugged 4Runner.

"The market confirmed that, when the Bronco came back to take on the Wrangler, this is what people want," said auto analyst Karl Brauer of iSeeCars.com. "Boulder is a perfect example of a new model jumping into a high-passion segment, and Nissan would love to recapture the passion they once had for Xterra."

Brauer said that GM has left the door open. "I'm surprised. They have Chevy Colorado ZR2 and GMC Canyon pickups – two brands that could easily justify (models) but neither Chevy nor GMC has a ladder-frame, off-road SUV."

The new Nissan Xterra will be powered by all-new V-6 engines including a hybrid variant, the company said this week. The tried-and-true internal combustion engine tech will be paired with a new, so-called e-Power hybrid system and AI-driven electronics that provide more driver assistance.

V-6 engines are a staple of big Nissan SUVs including the Pathfinder, Armada and Z sportscar. The brand's best-selling Rogue SUV will also be remade for the '27 model year, with updates including an e-Power electrified drivetrain in which a gas engine acts as a generator to power electric motors.

"As we continue on our path to recovery, it is essential that Nissan seizes the opportunities provided by AI technologies, by electrification and the innovation embedded in our latest products to drive market growth and focus relentlessly on serving the customer," said CEO Ivan Espinosa.

The body-on-frame Xterra is expected to arrive sometime in late 2028 as a 2029 model. The off-road SUV space parallels growth in the related, body-on-frame midsize pickup segment, which has doubled to nearly 5 percent of truck sales in the 10 years.

The last-gen Xterra, made in Mississippi on the Frontier's frame, ended production in 2015 as its chassis grew long in the tooth and new government emissions mandates increased costs. Last year, the Trump administration withdrew EPA mandates and returned mpg laws to 2008 standards set by Congress.

"There's no regulatory reason not to make vehicles like (the Xterra)," said Brauer. "Automakers can make cars that consumers and their market intelligence tell them will sell."

Hedging against future regulation, Nissan said that "EV investments will remain disciplined and responsive to market conditions and policy evolution."

Nissan said it also will extend the love to its luxury division, Infiniti. Three new models are promised by 2028, including a hybrid compact SUV (likely based on Rogue) and the return of the V6-powered Q50 compact sports sedan.

The plans are a 180-degree reversal from Nissan's previous plans to bring 19 new EVs to market for 40 percent of model share. With the demise of the Ariya last year, the $31,485 Leaf is the only Nissan left in the brand's EV quiver with just 0.5 percent of Nissan's 920,604 sales in 2025. Nissan said its goal is to return to 1 million-plus U.S. sales by 2030 (its high was 1.59 million units in 2017).

Nissan's U.S. plans came as part of a comprehensive company strategy that focuses on three international markets: Japan, China and the United States. It said product plans emphasize:

Heartbeat models (like Xterra Q50, Leaf, Z, Armada NISMO) "embodying Nissan's identity, emotional value, and innovation."

Core models (Rogue) that "sustain global business with scale and stability."

Growth models (Xterra, Leaf) targeting "expansion where demand is emerging."

Partner models that "extend market coverage through disciplined collaboration."

Nissan has a partnership in the United States with Mitsubishi to make plug-in hybrid models.

*Henry Payne is auto critic for The Detroit News. Find him at hpayne@detroitnews.com or Twitter @HenryEPayne.*

AUTO REVIEWS

# Rivian R1T Quad is a tank turnin', electron burnin', cargo storin' hoot

By HENRY PAYNE
The Detroit News (TNS)

Photo sby Henry Payne / The Detroit News / TNS

When I was a kid, I'd spin toy tanks in my sandbox, slinging sand while mimicking real tank turns. WHEEE! As I've grown older, my sandboxes have gotten bigger.

At Holly Oaks ORV Park, I stopped my 2026 Rivian R1T Quad pickup in the dirt and selected ALL-TERRAIN mode in the 15.6-inch console screen. I selected the KICK TURN icon and swiped PREPARE TO TURN. A Sasquatch-like cartoon character named Gear Guard Gary popped up and performed a break dance. Tank-turn time.

Holding the steering wheel straight, I pushed the RIGHT buttons on each steering spoke simultaneously, engaged the throttle and spun the pickup clockwise – slinging sand like a tank. WHEEE! Stop. Engage the LEFT buttons and spin counterclockwise. WHEEE!

Rivian Quad is a toy for big kids with big piggy banks.

The top-trim model is the Silicon Valley brand's latest addition to a supertruck segment that now parallels the hallowed supercar market that made Lamborghini, Ferrari and Porsche household names. Beginning with the Ford F-150 Raptor in 2010, hellions like Ranger Raptor, Ram 1500 RHO and Ram TRX have topped gas-powered truck lineups. They bring voracious, dirt-chewing appetites to off-road parks – not to mention Michigan stoplights.

The $117,790 R1T Quad is Rivian's brand halo. It joins the $117K Cyberbeast and $125K GMC Hummer with unique style, electrification and tech for the Supertruck Wars.

Like Hummer, the Rivian is a midsized truck. But in weight, tech and attitude, R1T is more kin to the full-size Cybertruck.

Both weigh about 3½ tons (7,000 pounds) compared to the five-ton Hummer (9,600 pounds). Both are halos to lineups beginning at $70K. Both feature polarizing styling (though the Rivian won't get you firebombed) and unique operating systems. Indeed, R1T (and sister R1S SUV) is the most Tesla-like OS in market.

Be prepared to spend time with the dealer learning Rivian's bottomless, screen-centric digital controls.

Approach R1T Quad with key (or phone app) in pocket and it unlocks. Slip into its tasteful interior, toe the brake pedal, and it's on. With a loooong press of the left steering wheel scroll button (Tesla uses the right scroll button), I activated VOICE CONTROL:

Navigate to Holly Oaks ORV Park, Holly, Michigan

We were off. But first, some 0-60 mph launches.

Stoplight. SPORT mode. Nail it. SCREEEEEE! Who said EVs were silent?

The wail of four electric motors telegraphs a breathtaking 1,025 horsepower and 1,198 pound-feet of torque (you read that right, the same as a $5 million Bugatti Mistral Hypercar). R1T exploded out of the light and past 60 mph in less than three seconds. That's on par with the Cybertruck Beast and quicker than Hummer's 3.3. Hold on while I circle back and pick up my stomach.

Settling into my trip, I turned over driving duties to Rivian.

Tesla (and its Magnificent Seven, trillion-dollar market cap) has its eyes set on a robot future and has leapt ahead of other manufacturers in its ability to self-drive you door-to-door.

Rivian's ambitions remain as a carmaker. It can't navigate to my destination like Cybertruck. But R1T's autonomous system proved competent on both highways and secondary roads as long as there were clear lines present.

Rivian has its own navigation system to complement its growing proprietary network of fast chargers. Recognizing Tesla's dominance (in Michigan alone, Tesla boasts five times the number of chargers as Rivian, including three in the remote Upper Peninsula), Rivian has smartly outfitted 2026 models with so-called NACS connectors to better access Tesla chargers. Unfortunately, Rivian can only access the newest models, so I found most Tesla Michigan chargers inaccessible.

Trip charging is the Achilles' heel of EVs with longer refueling times and fast-charging costs about the same as, say, filling up a Toyota Tacoma TRD Hybrid at $4-a-gallon. Trips are more problematic with EV pickups. The Rivian Quad's 338 miles of range will, according to test reports, be cut by 50-60 percent (139-174 miles) when towing. Ouch.

Home-charging is cheaper, once, ahem, you spend $1,000-$2,000 for home-charger installation. The R1T was the first EV I've tested that could charge on both my Level 2 Tesla charger and universal J1772 charger (the latter with an adapter provided by Rivian).

Had I kept going to, say, Charlevoix from Holly Oaks, I would have had to charge for an hour to make the trip.

Playing in the sandbox, you see, guzzles electrons.

Rivian accomplished its KICK TURN party trick not unlike a tank – by using two left-side motors to spin left-side wheels in one direction while right-side motors do the opposite. After making yourself dizzy with tank turns, let Quad loose across Holly's acres of hills and sand on capable, all-terrain Scorpion tires.

The bigger Cybertruck is remarkably agile thanks to its rear-wheel steer and pioneering steer-by-wire systems. With its shorter (by eight inches) wheelbase, R1T eschews rear-wheel steer confident in its inherently nimbler footprint. Equipped with air suspension, it can also pull up its skirts to 14 inches of ground clearance (or hunker down to eight inches for those SPORT sprints).

Thanks to Rivian's electric architecture (and creativity), R1T's secret sauce for trips and off-road adventures is storage.

Frunk? Check. Rear bed tonneau cover to protect my luggage from the elements on the way home from Detroit Metro Airport? Check. Sub-bed ice 'n' drink storage for a tailgate party? Check. Gear tunnel behind the rear seats? Check.

I'm a particular fan of the latter because it swallows long objects like tennis bags and snow sleds so they don't rattle 'round in the bed.

Inevitably, industry newbies like Rivian and Tesla have had reliability and service teething issues (Rivian has two service centers in Michigan). Both brands make up for it with loads of personality. Tesla is awash in goodies like Summon, fart seats, Boombox and so on. So too is Rivian.

In addition to the aforementioned Gear Patrol character, Rivian is imbued with plenty of beauty to complement its beastly power.

Walk away from the R1T and it'll lock automatically with an owl-like WHO-WHO tone. Onboard video provides security. Rivian even options how aggressively you want the pickup to drive in autonomous mode. I like it SPICY – as indicated by a bright red chili pepper icon in the dash.

It's a suitable icon for the entire R1T Quad experience.

*Henry Payne is auto critic for The Detroit News.*

### 2026 Rivian R1T Quad

★★★★

**Vehicle type:** All-wheel-drive, five-passenger pickup

**Price:** Base $74,885 for standard dual-motor, including $1,895 destination charge; $117,790 for quad-motor ($123,885 as tested)

**Powerplant:** 140 kWh lithium-ion battery pack mated to four electric motors

**Power:** 1,025 horsepower, 1,198 pound-feet torque

**Transmission:** Single-speed automatic

**Performance:** 0-60 mph, 2.6 seconds (Car and Driver); towing, 11,000 pounds

**Weight:** 6,987 pounds

**Range:** 338 miles on full charge

**Report card**

**Highs:** Tank turnin', wicked acceleratin' fun; storage options

**Lows:** Sporadic service network; gets pricey for a midsize pickup

# The second-cheapest car in America is unexpectedly good, but …

By LARRY PRINTZ
Tribune News Service (TNS)

If your recent encounter with the IRS has left you feeling like a medieval peasant who just paid tribute in both coin and dignity, yet you still require modern transportation, take heart. There is a brand-new automobile with an MSRP that doesn't require having to auction off a kidney. It's the 2026 Hyundai Venue, proof that the modern auto industry accidentally remembers that not everyone can afford a rolling conference room with 400 horsepower and a payment plan that outlives its owner.

Yet its $20,550 starting price explains its appeal and its limitations.

Let's start with the obvious: The 2026 Hyundai Venue is honestly small at 159-inches long. That's nearly three feet shorter than a Hyundai Santa Fe. Park it next to one of today's grotesquely overfed pickup trucks and it looks like it should be sold in a gift shop. You can park it anywhere. It slips into parking spaces other vehicles merely orbit. This is a car sized for reality, not for marketing decks.

Offered in SE and swankier SEL trim, all Venues get the same heart: a 1.6-liter four-cylinder engine producing a heroic 121 horsepower, which is just enough to merge onto the highway and weave through traffic. A continuously variable automatic transmission and front-wheel drive are standard; all-wheel drive is not offered. So, calling this an SUV is like trying to fit in those pair of jeans you've had since high school. It's a bit of wishful thinking. Put your foot down and the Venue responds with a sort of forced optimism. There's a Sport driving mode, which modestly increases responsiveness, but don't get preconceived notions about winning your local autocross.

On the road, the Venue is about as exciting as a pamphlet on municipal zoning laws. Body lean comes on quickly in corners, and the vehicle communicates the deteriorating state of American roads. Yet the ride never becomes turbulent or punishing, despite the short wheelbase and overall length. Handling is competent in the same way a golden retriever is competent at fetching a tennis ball. As for the steering, it provides all the feedback of a corporate email.

As you might expect, there's road and tire noise on most road surfaces, so you'll have to crank the audio system. But it's easy to drive, easy to park, and sips fuel like it's paying for it out of pocket, which, at an observed 33 mpg, you are. But this is where Hyundai plays its hand so well. The Venue doesn't pretend otherwise. It's mechanically honest in a way that's almost refreshing. You get what you get, and what you get is adequate.

Inside, Hyundai pulls off its usual trick of making cheap feel intelligently done. The materials are inexpensive, but they don't feel like they were sourced from a discount patio set. The layout is clean, the controls are where you expect them to be, and the sanely-sized 8-inch infotainment touchscreen works without requiring a weekend seminar. The front seats seem economy car spongy, but prove surprisingly supportive. In a world where many cars seem designed by people who hate drivers, the Venue is oddly considerate.

Of course, there are compromises. The back seat is best suited for children, small pets, or adults you don't particularly like. Cargo space is adequate, if your lifestyle doesn't involve anything larger than groceries. But anything more ambitious, like furniture, luggage for four or a Labrador Retriever with self-respect is simply not happening.

The Venue SEL supplied by Hyundai, base price $22,600, felt positively opulent, with such indulgences as wireless Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, a wireless phone charger, front and rear USB ports, automatic climate control, tilt/telescopic steering wheel, express-down power driver's window, heated front seats, steering-wheel-mounted audio and cruise controls, leather-wrapped steering wheel and shift knob, heated side mirrors and a rear cargo cover. It even had a blue and white exterior that proved to be quite fetching.

Where the 2026 Hyundai Venue shines is in its utter lack of pretense. It doesn't attempt any of the usual budget-car nonsense like pretending to be sporty or rugged. There's no Mountain Goat Driving Mode because Hyundai knows that the most challenging terrain this widget will ever see is an aggressive speed bump at Walgreens. In a world where every crossover wants to be an off-road warrior, a luxury lounge and a Nürburgring hero all at once, the Venue shows up and just wants to be a car. And here's the uncomfortable truth for most automakers: for a lot of people, this is enough. More than enough.

But I wouldn't go charging into a showroom like an overexcited Labradoodle. I'd also try the $21,700 Chevrolet Trax and the $20,490 Kia Soul. They're also built in South Korea, they're just as mechanically earnest – meaning not quick – and yet they manage to offer more space, more visual swagger, and a car that you'd choose, rather than one you were assigned by your financial adviser. Which makes the Venue feel less like a clever bargain and more like you stopped shopping too soon.

*Larry Printz is an automotive journalist based in South Florida.*

Hyundai / TNS

### 2026 Hyundai Venue

**Base price:** $20,550

**Powertrain:** 1.6-liter DOHC four-cylinder gas engine

**Horsepower/Torque:** 00/00 pound-feet

**EPA rating (combined city/highway):** 00 mpg

**Fuel required:** Regular unleaded

**Length/Width/Height:** 159/70/62 inches

**Ground clearance:** 6.7 inches

**Cargo capacity:** 19-32 cubic feet

**Towing capacity:** Not rated

# TECHNOLOGY

TECH REVIEW

## iPhone 17e gets a speed and storage bump for the same price

Apple iPhone 17e color options.
Apple / TNS

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Looking at products released in the last few years, you'll notice Apple is paying more attention to the lower cost end of the market.

These would include the iPad at $349, the MacBook Neo at $599 and, the subject of this week's review, the iPhone 17e.

Apple has a way of positioning products in price tiers. The iPhone 17 family includes the 17e starting at $599, the iPhone 17 starting at $799, the iPhone 17 Pro starting at $1,099 and the iPhone 17 Pro Max starting at $1,199.

### What it is

The best value in the iPhone 17 lineup, the 17e is an easy phone to recommend for users who want an iPhone but don't really stress about bigger screens or multiple cameras.

Apple introduced the "e" line of iPhones with the 16e last year, and the 17e improves on it in several areas.

The 17e uses the same A19 processor as the iPhone 17, which is powerful enough to do everything you'd need, including Apple Intelligence.

It has a 6.1-inch Super Retina XDR OLED display covered with Ceramic Shield 2 for very good scratch resistance. It has a resolution of 1,170 pixels by 2,532 pixels with 800 nits of brightness (1,200 nits peak).

Storage starts at 256 gigabytes, with an option for 512gb for another $200.

It's IP68 water and dust resistant, which means dropping it in the pool won't hurt it.

On the back, you'll notice just one camera – a 48-megapixel fusion camera with a 26mm lens and a f/1.6 aperture. It offers a 2x telephoto or up to 10x digital zoom.

On the front, you'll find a 12MP selfie camera.

Video recording options include capturing 4K videos up to 60 frames per second from both cameras.

The battery is capable of fast charging from zero to 50 percent in just 30 minutes if you use a 20-watt or higher USB charger. The USB-C port can transfer data at up to 480 Megabits per second.

It can provide up to 26 hours of video playback, and this year Apple has added MagSafe wireless charging (up to 15W) to the back of the 17e.

It is available in black, white or soft pink, and it measures 5.78 inches by 2.82 inches by 0.31 inches. It weighs just 5.96 ounces.

Like the other iPhone models, the 17e uses Face ID. It also includes Emergency SOS via satellite. It can also use satellite for Messages, Find My and roadside assistance.

It has Wi-Fi 6, Bluetooth 5.3, LTE and sub-6 GHz 5G. It has dual eSIM capabilities, but like the other iPhones, it has no physical SIM card slot.

### What it is not

This isn't Apple's flagship phone, and it isn't perfect.

The more expensive phones in Apple's lineup have a 120Hz ProMotion display, while the 17e's screen refreshes at 60Hz. This isn't a big deal for everyday use. Higher refresh rates make scrolling and fast on-screen action look smoother.

It also does not have an always-on display or an ultra-wide camera.

### Who is it for?

I've been using the iPhone 17e as my phone for the last few weeks and it has performed flawlessly.

I had been carrying the iPhone 17 Pro Max, and while the 17e is a step down in size, I haven't noticed a big hit in usefulness.

The only thing I've really missed is the 8x telephoto lens on the 17 Pro Max. I tend to take a lot of pictures and while the 17e's camera is great, I find myself wishing it had a longer reach.

This is a phone you should buy for your kids or your parents.

This is the perfect phone for my mom – who still loves the iPhone 16e she bought last year.

The 17e is fast, looks modern and will comfortably last at least five years.

Apple hasn't compromised on the storage, the battery life or the quality of materials.

If you're not the kind of person who pays attention to phone specs or worries if a phone will be powerful enough, then you'll be quite happy with the 17e.

*Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossman techadviser@gmail.com.*

GADGETS

## Great headphones at a nice price

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Here's a question I get often: What is a good set of over-the-head headphones for traveling that won't break the bank. And since traveling often includes flying, you want them to include some sort of noise-canceling.

That's an easy one to answer, especially with the new **OneOdio Focus A1 Pro hybrid active noise-canceling wireless headphones** sitting on my desk. The headphones have soft padded on-ear cups attached to an adjustable headband. Inside each ear cup is a 40 mm driver to produce solid sound.

At a budget friendly $34.99, these headphones deliver surprisingly decent sound, making them a solid choice for anyone looking for a budget-friendly option with the needed features. Of course they aren't going to produce the same sound as headphones costing five or 10 times that amount, but the sound is more than acceptable.

I've found that a good way to test noise-canceling is to wear them while the TV is on, but not connected to the TV with Bluetooth. Instead I want to see how much it's eliminated while I listen to music. These shined, letting me enjoy my music without the TV being a distraction.

All the controls are on the right ear cup for power, pairing, volume and music selections. The foldable and portable USB-C charging headphones are rated to give you up to 50 hours of playtime with the ANC on and 70 hours with it off. A full charge of the 600 mAh internal battery takes about 2 1/2 hours. Multipoint pairing is supported on the Focus A1 Pro, as it features Bluetooth 6.0 connectivity.

*https://www.oneodio.com/products/oneodio-focus-a1-pro-on-ear-hybrid-anc-headphones – MSRP is $49.99, but currently $34.99 at Amazon*

OneOdio new Focus A1 Pro.
OneOdio / TNS

Vitesy Shelfy.
Vitesy / TNS

When I first tested Vitesy's original Shelfy a short time ago, I came away impressed. Its main function is to keep the food in your refrigerator fresh. In a short time I found there was no doubt food lasts longer, especially fruit. Now the upgrade Shelfy version adds better battery life and a new color option.

The **Shelfy smart fridge purifier** is a compact device (6.6 by 4.5 by 2.6 inches) that stays in your refrigerator. It keeps your food fresher by eliminating bacteria and odors and breaking down pollutants that accelerate ripening. The only time you take it out of the refrigerator is to give it a USB-C charge.

A quick fact supplied by Shelfy when I reviewed (and became a fan) of the original model in late 2024: "The world wastes about 2.5 billion tons of food every year, and the United States is the leader, discarding more food than any other country. This adds up to an approximate value of nearly $218 billion – the equivalent of 130 billion meals wasted annually in America."

And this year they have added the fact that the average U.S. family of four loses nearly $3,000 worth of uneaten food annually. I can say first hand that I'm in that group. For the first model, I ran side-by-side tests of fresh fruit with and without the Shelfy and there was no doubt the device made a difference.

As mentioned, the new model adds better battery life and the option of turning on blue LED lighting to make photocatalysis more efficient. The Shelfy requires no filters; there is a built-in ceramic-coated filter that is washed with water now and then. With the Vitesy Hub it will show you the last time the filter was washed and other features such as when the battery needs to be charged.

The app also tells you how often your refrigerator doors have been opened and the temperature inside, and real-time fridge analytics. Within the app the modes can be changed, which is essential for the placement and the food its working to keep fresh. The modes include ECO for daily use, Crisper for a drawer with fruits and vegetables, and Performance for a temporary and intensive action.

*https://vitesy.com/shelfy – $129.99 each, or $239.99 for a pair*

*Contact Gregg Ellman at greggellman@mac.com. Follow him on Twitter @gregg ellman.*

## Wired or wireless?

### Which way should you charge your phone?

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

When it comes to charging your phone, is it better to use a wired or wireless charger?

Does it even make a difference?

The vast majority of phones sold today have a USB-C charging port. Apple was really the last holdout, as they used Lightning ports to charge, but our friends in the European Union mandated that all phones sold in Europe had to have a USB-C port to charge. This ruling forced Apple to change, and they introduced USB-C to the iPhone and iPad.

Apple and Samsung and Google have also included Qi wireless charging to their handsets. Apple took the additional step of including some magnets to help users perfectly position their phones on the wireless chargers. Apple calls their iteration of wireless charging MagSafe.

The magnets are also very handy for phone mounts. A lot of companies have included magnets in their car mounts.

The one thing to know about charging options is that wired charging will usually be faster than wireless charging. So if you need to top off in a hurry, grab the wire.

Chargers of both types can vary in speed depending on the amount of power provided by the USB charger they are using. You want to pay attention to the watts provided to each port by charger and choose one with enough power to charge as fast as possible.

When I'm buying USB chargers these days, 30 watts is my minimum, but 45 watts is where I'm comfortable. This is for one port. If you want to buy a multiport charger, look to brands you've heard of like Anker. They have a 140-watt 4-port charger that can fast-charge all your gear at the same time.

You'll never get great charging speeds out of a wireless charger, so I use those in places like my car or my nightstand, where I'm parking my phone for more than a few minutes while I drive or sleep.

One other consideration is heat. Wireless chargers generate more heat than wired charging.

Heat won't do much to hurt your daily battery run time But batteries like to be cool; spending more time on warm wireless chargers mean the batteries will have a shorter lifespan before they need replacing. But it might be several years before you'll notice.

*Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossmantechadviser @gmail.com.*

An Apple MagSafe charger and MagSafe battery.
Apple / TNS

**The one thing to know about charging options is that wired charging will usually be faster than wireless charging. So if you need to top off in a hurry, grab the wire.**

# SCENES FROM SPACE

## Artemis II crew used modern photography to tell the visual story of their lunar journey – and update some classic Apollo images

**By JENNIFER LEVASSEUR**
Curator, National Air and Space Museum (The Conversation)

At this point in NASA's human spaceflight story, researchers have a substantial amount of material – documents, artifacts and images – with which to tell the stories of past flights to space. But with NASA's Artemis II mission around the Moon now in the books, we're getting a refreshed look at space.

And the digital photographs transmitted back to Earth – even mid-mission – tell a modern story of the crew's experience. Entire generations born after Apollo 17's last close-up looks at the Moon in 1972 may hardly believe the reality of Artemis II in the age of AI-generated deep fakes. But this mission was real, and four humans can tell the tale of their adventure using the photographs safely stored on memory cards now in NASA's hands.

As a space historian and curator well-versed in the visual culture of human spaceflight, I've long anticipated seeing the photographs of a return to the Moon.

Post-Apollo, images of space travel were characterized by launching space shuttles, Erector Set-like space stations and Mars rovers crossing a dusty landscape. While the Artemis II photos have timeless, classic elements similar to the Apollo photos, better photographic tools give them a clean, crisp vibe. Space travel now looks more like many people may imagine it's supposed to look: grand, adventurous, audacious, sublime.

As part of Gen X, I have no personal memory of Apollo. Like many born after NASA's first slate of lunar missions, my memories of space include visuals like the ill-fated Challenger launch; Mercury program astronaut John Glenn's return to orbit in a space shuttle in 1998, at age 77; and seeing photos of deep space from the Hubble Space telescope. But these events didn't include humans on or near the Moon, and many people around my age are thirsty for their own lunar memories to share.

Thanks to the internet and social media, which allow people to access images at a greater speed and volume than ever before, photographs from the Artemis II crew became almost instantly iconic. They were also compared to what came before, as they fit within a mental catalog of exploration photography that's far older than humans' earliest attempts at space travel.

### Planning and taking photos

Artemis II crew members Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, Christina Koch and Jeremy Hansen had weeks' worth of photography training with a slew of Nikon digital cameras and iPhones. Taking photos with the device so many people have in their pockets is leaps and bounds beyond photography equipment used during Apollo 17 – even the 1960s-era 35mm camera.

NASA's preference for using the Nikon D5 on the International Space Station has extended to Artemis II. This camera performs well, and NASA likes tried and true reliability when astronauts travel to space.

NASA took a decidedly different path when planning for images of the Moon with Artemis, compared to Apollo. First, the Orion spacecraft used on Artemis is bigger, and it has double the number of windows and cameras inside. Five of Orion's six windows had live-streaming video cameras capturing the lunar flyby.

Because of their wide swing around the Moon at a distance greater than any Apollo flight, this crew could see more of the Moon in a single glance.

Artemis' crew trained intensively with geologists and other scientists to be on the lookout for more prospective landing sites for future missions, craters and just interesting events or features. People watching live online could hear their descriptions of what they saw. The conversation between the astronauts on the Orion capsule and the Artemis Science Team was also broadcast.

### Exciting new photos

Based on the launch date and the position of the Moon, the crew was prepared for unique angles like Earthset – similar to sunset – and a solar eclipse.

Earthrise – like sunrise – was made familiar by Apollo 8. But it wasn't visible in the same way for Artemis II due to the Moon's darkness in its current phase. So, while denied a chance to compare an Earthrise of today with that of 1968, another moment early in the mission provided what might be an even more spectacular visual alignment with memories of Apollo.

In 1972, as the crew of Apollo 17 began their journey to the Moon, geologist Harrison Schmitt captured a series of images of the fully lit disc of Earth at around five hours after the start of the mission. This photo became an icon within a series of iconic photographs of the Space Age, and probably the entire 20th century. It was even featured in Al Gore's film "An Inconvenient Truth."

That was Earth 1972, and now we have Earth 2026 – both serving as documents of singular moments in Earth's long history. This new photograph shows Earth – lit by the Moon's glow, not the Sun, as with the Apollo 17 photo – in the black void of space, the thin sliver of our atmosphere shielding life, and generating polar aurorae.

Schmitt's "Blue Marble" spent over five decades as one of the most-viewed photographs in history. And while people back on Earth saw the new Artemis version within hours of capture, it might get less public recognition in an age of photo manipulation and high-tech wizardry.

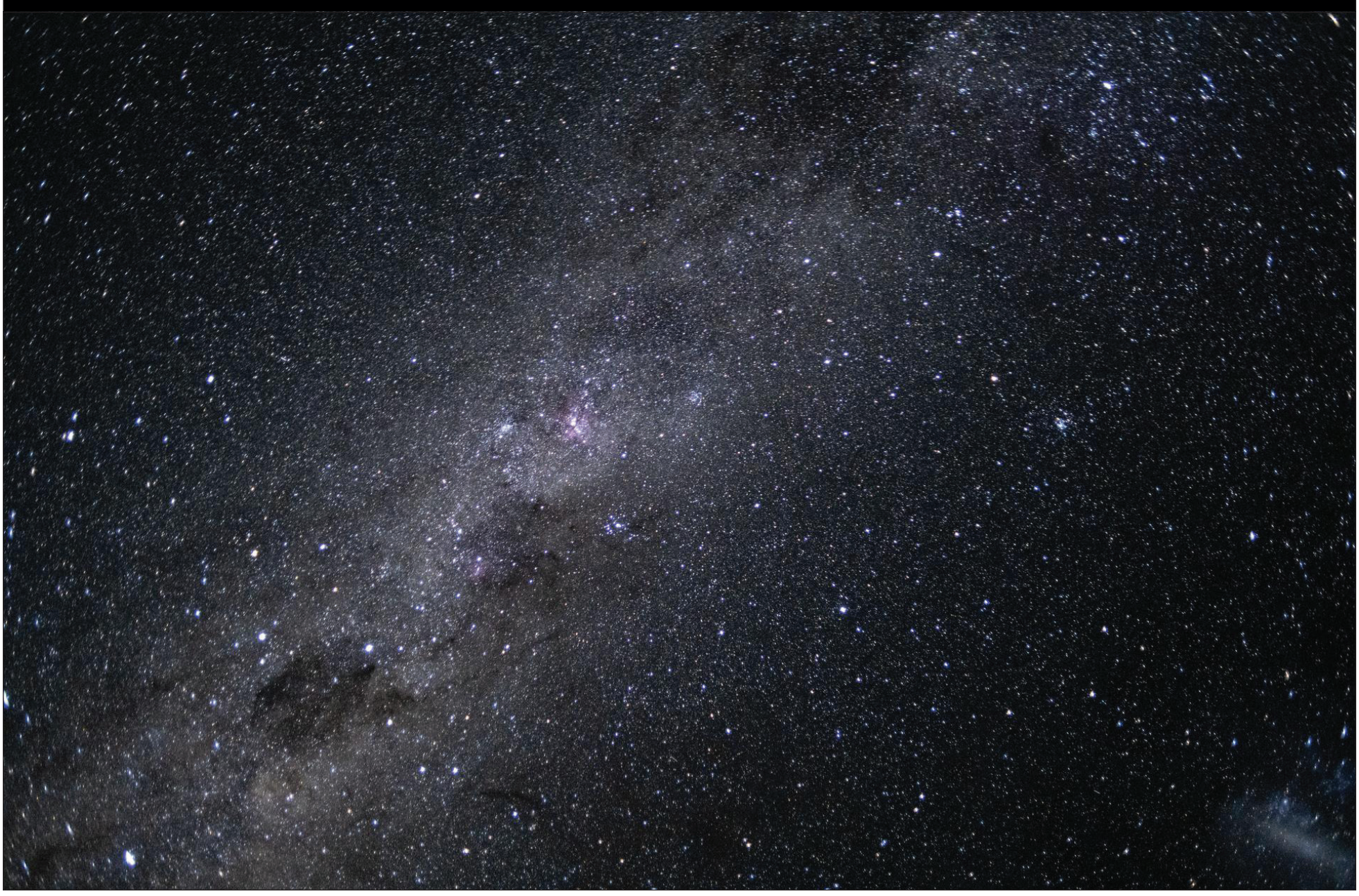
These first few images from Artemis II are just the tip of the imagery iceberg, though. Modern memory cards have a capacity that will allow the number of digital images from Artemis II to far surpass the nearly 4,000 photoscaptured during Apollo 17.

In the weeks and months to come, as mission images fill online databases, Artemis II's significance as a fresh new vision for human space exploration will continue to grow, building on the lessons of Apollo.

*Jennifer Levasseur is curator of the National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution. The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.*

**TOP IMAGE:** NASA astronaut and Artemis II Commander Reid Wiseman peers out of one of the Orion spacecraft's main cabin windows, looking back at Earth, as the crew travels towards the moon during its recent mission. **BELOW:** A stunning snapshot in time. The Artemis II crew captured this breathtaking photo of our galaxy, the Milky Way. The Milky Way's elegant spiral structure is dominated by just two arms wrapping off the ends of a central bar of stars. Spanning more than 100,000 light-years, Earth is located along one of the galaxy's spiral arms, about halfway from the center.

Photos by NASA



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HOME & GARDEN

**DESIGN RECIPES**

# SPRING SELLING HACKS

**By CATHY HOBBS**
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Spring is widely considered to be one of the most robust and competitive selling seasons in real estate.

With spring typically a time flush with inventory, sellers are no longer just competing on price; they are competing on presentation. This is when home staging and proper marketing come into play. Buyers are drawn to homes that feel fresh, bright and move-in ready. The difference between a home that lingers and one that sells quickly often comes down to a curated approach to presentation.

Looking for selling tips for spring? Here are some top tips.

### Do

Do maximize natural light. Open window treatments, clean glass surfaces and ensure nothing blocks light from entering the home.

Do introduce living design and décor elements. Fresh flowers, light greenery and spring inspired accents create a sense of freshness without feeling overly styled.

Do refresh your color palette. Lighter tones, soft neutrals and clean whites help spaces feel larger, brighter and more aligned with the season.

Do focus on outdoor spaces. Patios, porches and entryways should feel like extensions of an organized, clean staged home.

Do update accessories and accents. New pillows, fresh bedding, updated hardware and simple styling tweaks can go a long way in transforming a space.

### Don't

Don't over-personalize a space. Avoid themes or elements that are overly personalized. Buyers want a clean, neutral environment, not a seasonal display.

Don't ignore curb appeal. Overgrown landscaping, worn entryways or neglected exteriors can immediately turn buyers away.

Don't leave winter elements in place. Heavy throws, dark colors and bulky textures can make a home feel out of sync with the season.

Don't overlook scent and freshness. Stale air, pet odors or strong fragrances can negatively impact the showing experience.

Don't assume "good enough" is enough. For most Americans, their home is their single biggest asset. When it comes time to sell one's home, you will want to put your best foot forward and make sure your home stands out from the competition.

*Cathy Hobbs is the owner of Cathy Hobbs Design Recipes, a home staging company based in New York City (www.cathyhobbs.com). She is also the owner of Highland Passive House, a Home Staging + Design Center based in New York's Hudson Valley (www.highlandpassivehouse.com). Cathy's practical, how-to design advice can also be found in her book, "Home Design Recipes."*

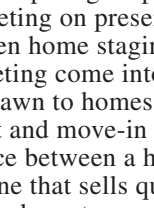
**ABOVE:** A neutral but elegant dining space creates a space that will appeal to a large amount of potential buyers. **RIGHT:** Wall stickers are used instead of wallpaper to infuse an element of interest.

Handout / TNS

# How can I reduce allergens in my home?

Spring is in full bloom, but the warm weather also brings the official start of allergy season. While there isn't much you can do to prevent or avoid outdoor allergens, removing indoor irritants can go a long way in making the allergy season more manageable.

**Angie Hicks**
Ask Angi



Pet dander, dust mites and mold are some of the most common home allergens, so it's important to clean your home thoroughly and regularly keep them at bay. Pay extra attention to areas that collect a lot of dust, like ceiling fans, vents and shelving.

If you don't have the time or ability to clean your home on a regular basis, bring in a professional cleaning service to do it for you. I recommend sharing your allergens (if you have identified them) with your cleaning service to make sure they know what to focus on. If you choose to clean your home yourself, consider wearing a mask to protect yourself from loose dust while cleaning.

You can also make a few upgrades to your home to make it easier to clean. Swap out carpets (which can trap allergens and be difficult to clean) for easy-to-clean hard floors. Dust mites thrive in bedding, so it's also a good idea to cover your mattress and make sure all of your bedding is easy to clean.

Dreamstime

**Reduce the allergens in your home by cleaning regularly, replacing your air filters, and being careful about what you bring indoors. (Dreamstime/TNS)**

Having clean air filters is one of the easiest and most impactful ways to reduce allergens in your home. I recommend replacing your air filters at least once every three months to remove allergens and keep your air as clean as possible. You may need to replace them more often if you have pets, are particularly sensitive to allergens, or live in an area with a lot of pollen or other irritants. If you have a specific allergy trigger, look for an air filter that filters out that particular allergen. You can also give your air quality an extra boost by purchasing an air purifier or two and placing them in high-traffic areas in your home.

A lot of indoor allergens are actually tracked in from outside. An open window, your shoes, or even your clothing could bring in pollen or other outdoor irritants. If you're particularly sensitive to outdoor allergens, take your shoes off when entering your home and keep your windows closed during allergy season.

*Tweet your home care questions with #AskingAngi and we'll try to answer them in a future column.*

Tourists watch as a cheetah walks past in their safari vehicle during the rainy season in the Masai Mara National Reserve, Kenya on April 25, 2023.
Andrew Caballero-Reynolds / AFP / Getty Images / TNS

# *Unforgettable destinations*
## for multi-gen trips, according to travel advisers

**By JESSICA PUCKETT**
TravelPulse (TNS)

Multi-generational trips can sound fun in theory, but when it comes to the planning stage, it can feel almost impossible to settle on a destination that meets everyone's needs.

Fortunately, there are several strategies you can use to find spectacular places for a multi-gen vacation that will please everyone in your brood, from toddlers to teenagers and grandparents.

Here's a look at unforgettable destinations for multigenerational trips, so you can cut straight to making memories as an extended family.

### How to choose a destination for a multi-gen trip

The first step to choosing a destination for a multi-gen group is to identify each family member's needs, especially when it comes to each person's activity level, according to luxury travel agency Red Savannah.

"Younger children will need lots of space to run and play, perhaps with a playground area close to the main house," Red Savannah says. "A tennis court will also keep youngsters, and older family members happy for a few hours, as well as a pool–most will prefer a heated pool outside of the peak summer months."

Just as important as planning activities is to plan areas where family members can retreat for a sense of privacy and calm. Look for accommodations that offer private terraces or balconies off of bedrooms, along with a library or sunroom that can act as designated quiet zones.

Choosing a location on the outskirts of a town is a good idea too: larger families will have plenty of space, while also maintaining access to shops and restaurants. "Most multi-gen parties are likely to want to be near enough to a village for one or two of the party to head to make their own entertainment from time to time, or simply to pop out to a boulangerie," Red Savannah says.

With that advice in mind, here's a look at a few ideas for where to book a multi-generational vacation:

### Multi-gen cruise to Alaska

Alaska has become one of the top-requested destinations for multi-generational trips, according to Robyn Jacobs of Orca Travel Agency. It's not hard to see why. For an outdoorsy adventure with the whole extended family, an Alaska cruise is an ideal option. Families can immerse themselves in awe-inspiring landscapes and see rare wildlife, while having access to a wide array of activities back on board.

When MSC's newly refurbished ship MSC Poesia debuts in Alaska in May, for example, the vessel will offer a reimagined slate of family programming geared toward multi-generational groups. Families can embark on thrilling excursions like whale watching tours or exploring the ice caves of Mendenhall Glacier while in port. When they return to the ship, they can partake in new entertainment offerings, including game show experiences like Quiz O'Clock and Chart Toppers, a refreshed Lego Family Game Show, and an expanded Naturalists program with enrichment talks, presentations on wildlife, and a dedicated children's session.

The refurbished Poesia will also offer newly outfitted with MSC's "ship-within-a-ship" concept, the MSC Yacht Club, which offers 69 spacious suites with access to private amenities and 24-hour butler service, giving older family members a more serene space to relax.

### Private villas in Umbria or Tuscany

Italy is a hard destination to beat for a multi-gen trip, with amazing history, breathtaking landscapes, and of course, its legendary culinary scene. "Italy is incredibly accommodating for families, with children welcomed in many restaurants," according to Red Savannah.

Italian regions known for spacious villas are a perfect fit for multi-generational groups. "Many villas in Tuscany and Umbria, for example, are converted farmhouses with lots of character, often with separate barns that have been converted into annexes that sit adjacent to a main farmhouse," Red Savannah says.

Properties with multiple buildings or separate guesthouses are perfect for grandparents who might want more peace and quiet or teenagers who want to be rowdier, according to Red Savannah. They usually have their own entrance but are still connected to the property's communal amenities like a pool or garden.

An example of an ideal villa for multi-gen groups would be Casale di Fiesole. Located in the Tuscan countryside 30 minutes from Florence, the property offers plenty of space and a peaceful escape with easy access to a wealth of museums, galleries, restaurants, and boutiques.

### Residential-style resort in the Maldives

The Four Seasons Maldives at Kuda Huraa offers unfettered access to the crystal clear waters and powder-soft shores of the Indian Ocean – a stunning backdrop for a relaxing multi-gen vacation. The top-tier, off-the-grid resort is the perfect place for generations of family members to bond.

In addition to its pristine shore line, the property offers special programming to suit all ages and encourages time together, like private yacht and snorkeling tours, tennis and surfing lessons for all ability levels, and even PADI dive training centers geared toward children, teens, and adults.

Accommodations-wise, the resort offers a three-bedroom estate well-suited to large family groups of up to six adults and three children. The beachfront villa comes with a private pool, full kitchen, dining room, and living room, all framed by sweeping ocean views. It all adds up to the perfect location for an extended family to combine relaxation and once-in-a-lifetime activities.

### 'Legacy' safaris in Africa

African safaris are an emerging sector of the multi-generational category, and the trend is set to pick up steam in 2026. "We're witnessing the emergence of 'legacy safaris' [which are] multigenerational groups seeking transformative wildlife encounters that blend meaningful conservation work with solid safari experiences," according to a report from luxury travel operator Abercrombie & Kent.

"Kenya remains the gold standard, with families now extending stays to include hands-on conservation alongside traditional game drives, creating deeper emotional connections to wildlife preservation."

The company's forthcoming safari lodge, Kitirua Plains, an A&K Sanctuary in Kenya's Amboseli National Park, was designed with family legacy safaris in mind. The lodge opens in June and offers 13 standalone suites (some of which have two bedrooms) set in a 128-acre private concession adjacent to the park with captivating views of Mount Kilimanjaro. The park is an Unesco Biosphere and is known for its large herds of roaming elephants, which families can observe during game drives. Visitors can also visit local Maasai communities and help out in A&K's work to support healthcare services, education, and more.

Multi-gen groups can also expand their trip to A&K's two additional Sanctuary properties in Kenya: Olonana in the Maasai Mara, known for its proximity to the Great Migration, and Tambarare Camp in Ol Pejeta Conservancy, home to the last two remaining northern white rhinos on earth.

# The SKI trend that's reshaping travel

**By NOREEN KOMPANIK**
TravelPulse (TNS)

It's not what you think. The SKI trend has nothing to do with snow and slopes.

SKI stands for "Spending Kids Inheritance," a new trend that's beginning to reshape how affluent travelers are spending their money on luxury travel. With the largest generational wealth transfer in history underway, Forbes says that $84 trillion is expected to transfer from baby boomers to younger generations in the U.S. by 2045.

The trend represents a new wave of travelers prioritizing experiences over traditional luxury purchases. Research also suggests that travel is becoming the top discretionary spending category for affluent travelers. According to Charles Schwab, nearly 40 percent of individuals with $1 million-plus investible assets say travel will be their luxury spend, even as spending on traditional luxury goods softens.

As a result, a growing number of travelers are embracing the "SKI" travel trend, choosing to spend on bucket-list trips and one-in-a-lifetime experiences rather than saving wealth for the next generation. In many cases, this includes the baby boomer generation of travelers picking up the tab for children and grandchildren on vacation. In lieu of physical gifts for holidays, birthdays and other memorable events, baby boomers are gifting travel experiences – shared adventures that capture moments that will long be remembered rather than physical gifts that are eventually forgotten.

For many retirees in this age group, the new philosophy is to give your kids and grandkids values and memories, not just money. The approach of many generational families I interact with in my boomer world agree that it doesn't have to be an "all or nothing" approach, rather creating a legacy floor balancing inheritance with allocating time and money on travel and experiences.

According to Kyle Oram, founder of KVI Travel and recently launched KVI Luxe, the company's luxury travel division, "We're seeing a generational shift from a mindset of scarcity to one of abundance, where affluent travelers are prioritizing experiences over possessions."

He added, "At KVI Luxe, we focus on creating highly personalized experiences that reflect how important travel is in our clients' lives. We often say we're architects of joyful moments' and that's exactly how we approach every itinerary."

Regarding booking behavior and demand, Kyle says his company is seeing strong demand for customer itineraries that include elements of surprise and discovery. Clients are looking for experiences that they couldn't plan on their own. On a recent trip to Andalusia, what was planned as a polo demonstration turned into a fully immersive experience. Within an hour, we were on horseback and playing. That kind of unexpected moment is exactly what today's luxury traveler is seeking."

Part of the shift to the SKI trend is related to many retirees watching others die before enjoying their life savings, so, they want to prioritize new experiences now. As a result, these baby boomers know full well the dangers of putting off trips that they can and should take 'now.' Health issues or the loss of family members and friends taught us all one thing during COVID, that if you put it off until tomorrow, that tomorrow might never come.

Glenn Hartz / Dreamstime / TNS
**"Spending Kids Inheritance," a new trend that's beginning to reshape how affluent travelers are spending their money on luxury travel.**

Science has also something to contribute to the matter. According to Cornell University professor Dr. Thomas Gilovich who conducted a 20-year study on material possessions versus experiences he said, "In reality, we remember experiences long afterward, while we soon become used to our possessions. At the same time, we also enjoy the anticipation of having an experience more than owning a possession."